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Every dish tells its own story. A story of a people, of a community, of change. This book is about the food of four villages in Maharashtra and the stories we learnt from them.

We would like to thank the villagers of Khandgedara, Malegaon Pathar, Khadki Budruk and Shiswad for sharing their stories and recipes with us.

WOTR – for giving us the opportunity to travel and the freedom to explore and express our views.

Our mothers. Without whose guidance, love and angry glares, this project would never have seen the light of day.

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First Bite

An Introduction

-Shweta Radhakrishnan

"Food can tell us about anything and everything. It's simultaneously molecular, bodily, social, economic, cultural, global, political, environmental, physical and human geography"

-Probyn, 1999; Crewe, 2001; Stassart and Whatmore, 2003¹



You are what you eat. In more ways than one. Food is an integral part of who a person is. Our food choices shape us and define us in many ways. Eating food is hardly a matter of consuming the ingredients so meticulously put together on your plate. It is about biting into a culture and for that

¹Cook Et Al., I. "Geographies of Food: following." *Progress in Human Geography* 30.5 (2006): 655-66. SAGE. Web. 15 May 2011.

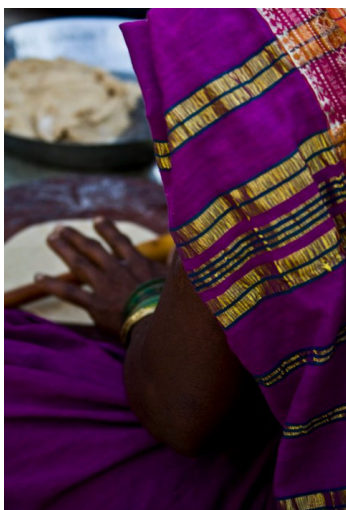
brief moment, partaking of its history and geographical details, its hierarchies, its conflicts, folklore—in short, pretty much everything.

Food is an integral part of culture everywhere. It is a direct product of the social, economic and environmental factors that operate in a region. Like the detective of a good novella, if one pays close attention to the clues, a larger story is revealed. Clues regarding the story of a community are almost always hidden in the food, which when uncovered, help us construct a picture of the community. The staple dishes of a region are indicative not merely of the community's taste preferences, they also let you in on secrets like what vegetables grow there, what kind of soil is predominant in the region, what climate conditions it is subject to, etc. In addition, food provides clues about a person's social standing in the community and his or her religious beliefs. Food reveals whether life is hard or easy in a particular region. Through the recipes we have collected in this book, our attempt is to bring to you the stories that the food of this region tells.

The book is a result of our eight-day trip to four villages in Maharashtra- Khandgedara, Malegaon Pathar, Khadki Budruk and Shiswad. These are the stories we heard from the cuisine and the people who created the cuisine. It is an exploration of the culture (of which we can claim to have had no more than a very limited, mediated access) of these four villages through the food served by these villages, because it is precisely through the food that we entered their cultures. Our first interaction in all the villages was the meal. And for us, the meal was not only much-welcome food, but also the point of engagement with the culture of that community.

Khandgedara was the first village we went to. Situated in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, this little village was preparing for the week-long Saptah when we got there. The Saptah is a religious celebration of sorts where every evening, *abhangs* and *kirtans* (religious songs) are sung with great gusto, while the men dance to the beat of the *abhangs*. Culinarily speaking, what is interesting about the Saptah, is that for the seven days of the Saptah, the village dines together in the night. Plates are laid out in the village square and the entire village community comes out to dine there for those seven days. What is even more interesting is that the men cook the dinner for these seven days. We asked several people why the men cooked the meal and the only answer we got was that it was done to provide some respite for the women and had no special significance.

We arrived in the village a little before dinner. So, one of our first interactions with the community happened over dinner. We had the spicy *usal* (sprouts) curry with rice and *sheera* (sweet dish made out of semolina) with relish. The woman sitting next to us was extremely amused at how hungrily we ate everything and asked if we liked the food. A couple of us found it spicy but the *sheera* helped soothe the spiciness of the curry.



(Woman making chapati)

The meals we had in this village during the remainder of our visit were relatively simple and humble. Millets, also known as the poor man's grains, are a staple in this village. *Bajrichi bhakri*, a flatbread made out of pearl millet is a popular dish. A *bhakri* is a flatbread made with coarser millets like *jowar* (sorghum), *ragi* (finger millet) and *bajra* (pearl millet). These millets are called the poor man's grains because they require fewer resources to grow, compared to rice and wheat. Their nutrition levels are similar to those of wheat and they grow more easily than wheat in this region. The economics of food has a lot to do with the development of any cuisine. The ability to purchase certain ingredients is also an essential component of what gets included or excluded from a cuisine. In Shiswad, a tribal village in the Akole Taluka (a block within Ahmednagar district) the villagers served black tea heavily flavoured with lemongrass because they couldn't afford to use milk in the tea. A dish known as *Methichi Patal Bhaaj* (and mentioned in the list of recipes below) is a gravy made using *methi* (fenugreek). The dish is probably made as a gravy, rather than a dry dish, because *methi* (fenugreek) tends to shrink when fried, thereby greatly reducing the quantity that can be served. However, when cooked in gravy, the volume is greater and the dish can be served to more people.

Speaking of economics, the globalization of food and the inclusion of outside food products in one's daily meal is a sign of affluence. The material display of one's ability to go beyond what is immediately available and procure from somewhere else what one wants is apparent when there are shops that sell foodstuffs produced outside. While in Khandgedara, the absence of outside food stuff was conspicuous, in two other villages, Khadki Budruk and Malegaon Pathar, the villagers used pickles manufactured outside. Malegaon Pathar is a village a few kilometres away from Khandgedara and is more affluent than Khandgedara. The food here was accompanied by pickles that were bought and not made within the village itself. The accompanying *poppadam* and the generous sprinkling of coconut on the *poha* (breakfast made out of flattened rice, onions and peanuts) were all tell-tale signs

of affluence. These are indulgences affordable only when one has a certain economic and social standing. The meals in the other village, Khadki Budruk also came with a generous helping of *poppadoms* and store-bought pickle. Shiswad had a ration store, while Khandgedara had a small makeshift store which sold mainly soap and chocolates. Khadki and Malegaon, on the other hand, had bigger shops which stocked varied food items. The greater the exposure to outside products, the greater also the desire to imitate them. In many villages we saw a more localized version of the *Rasna* powder (a popular Indian instant drink mix), morphed into *Ras Hai Na* and *Ras Pi Na*. This powder, manufactured in Madhya Pradesh, is now available in most of the villages we went to. We were served this when we attended a *Sakharpuda* (engagement ceremony) and it was served as a symbol of affluence and to establish the family's social standing.



(Ras Hai Na being served at the engagement)

The consumption of meat is closely tied to religion and social standing. In Khandgedara, the Maratha part of the village was populated by a vegetarian community, while the people who lived in the Thakarwasti hamlet consumed non-vegetarian food. The main village in Khandgedara abstained

from non-vegetarian food because of their religious beliefs. Local lore has it that the village stopped rearing poultry and consuming chicken meat because chickens dirtied the village. Fed up with having to clean up continuously after the chicken, they decided to ban chicken-rearing in the community. However, the tribals in the Thakarwasti hamlet, who did not subscribe to these religious codes, ate non-vegetarian food with zest. Similarly, a few families in Malegaon ate meat but the majority seemed to be vegetarian. Khadki Budruk, is a largely tribal village, populated by the Mahadev Koli tribe. The *ajji* (grandmother) in whose house we ate, was a Mahadev Koli but she was also a *malkari*. *Malkaris* are generally devotees of Lord Vitthal (Krishna) who undertake a pilgrimage on foot every year. They wear a *mala* (necklace) as a sign of devotion and follow certain dietary restrictions (they are vegetarians). Therefore, *ajji* didn't cook or serve non-vegetarian food in her house. Others in the village consumed meat. Another *ajji* who was a Neo-Buddhist, used to cook dry fish every day.



(A Kitchen cum dining area in Malegaon Pathar)

The organization of dining space is also integral to understanding how food and social structures are intertwined. Dining in Khandgedara was never a private affair. Perhaps the sense of community was largely due to the *Saptah*, but the one day that we were invited to dine in somebody's house for dinner, others casually walked in and joined the meal as well. The village and the houses are designed in a way that facilitates this kind of interaction. People walk in and out of each other's houses all the time and the idea of a meal as a private family affair does not seem to be the norm here. In Malegaon, the village was designed in such a way that each house had its own private space. Dining was a more private, family event as opposed to Khandgedara. It was the same in Khadki Budruk. In Shiswad, however, the day we arrived, half the village had left for an engagement. So, I'm not really sure how the dining spaces are constructed. But a superficial comparison of dining spaces and the economic condition of the village gives the impression that segregated and more individualized dining spaces are the result of greater material affluence and 'development'.

Eight days of village life and dining later, we headed back to Pune. Back in office, we were discussing the food, when we mentioned to a colleague that we had managed to get some chicken curry in Shiswad (we had been craving non-vegetarian food for those eight days). He asked us about the chicken pieces in the curry. The pieces had actually been so finely diced that it was hard to make out which piece had come from which part of the chicken. He told us that the last time he had had chicken curry in that village he had been unlucky enough to find a whole chicken head and foot on his plate. He laughed and said, "They eat pretty much every part of the chicken." A few days later we were sharing home-made chicken curry with an American colleague and he happened to get a neck piece. He stared at it for a while and began to grow noticeably uncomfortable until we asked him if he wanted another piece. He quickly exchanged the piece for another one and confessed that in America they didn't eat the neck piece. I was amused; to him, we must have seemed like the villagers

did to my colleague - strange people who eat every part of the bird without distinguishing the 'good' or 'edible' pieces from the 'bad' (non-edible) ones.

So much of food *is* culture. Our culture dictates our ingredients, our preferences, the way we consume food and also constructs binaries of what is acceptable and unacceptable within a cuisine. This book is an attempt to explore this connection between food and culture and the recipes included in this book reveal how different communities use their available resources to produce indigenous cuisines.

Of people, plates and palates

-Shweta Ghosh

The sun set over distant mountains as the car danced its way up and down the slopes. Earphones tightly plugged into my ears, I began to doze off. The light breeze just made things better. Suddenly the car stopped and I was woken up from my imagined dream. "We've reached," someone said. I was annoyed. "Just this song," a voice inside me pleaded, "I'll get off just after this one's over." But I was to be allowed no such luxury. Someone had already opened the rear door of the Tata Sumo.

I jumped off my seat...partly out of irritation and partly due to no other way to negotiate all the luggage sitting with me on the back seat. A whiff of clean, fresh air struck my face, and I knew this one was going to be different. I stretched and turned around, only to see a bunch of kids peering curiously. My friends and I smiled courteously, picked up our bags and headed towards what was to be our home for the two day trip. On the way, one of my friends pointed to something. Before I could hear what she said, a little girl exclaimed, "It's for the *Saptah*. They're going to start singing soon. Do you want to come?" "Err...sure," I said, unsure of what this *Saptah* was all about, "We'll just keep our stuff and be there in a minute."

The night was dark and there was no electricity. The crickets chirped in rhythm with the distinct beats of the a mridanga and cries of 'Jai Jai Ram Krishna Hari', which seemed to inch closer

as we approached the site of the *Saptah*. “What is this *Saptah*?” I asked a little one. “It’s a festival. We sing *kirtans* (hymns) and eat together”, she obliged.

So this festival had food! Suddenly, I felt better. As we entered the *pandal* (tent) set up for the *Saptah*, I felt that this was no ordinary festival. And I was right.



(The kirtan programme at the *Saptah*)

In one corner of the *pandal*, men, approximately between the age group of 25 and 50, chinked brass cymbals and danced rhythmically in a semi circle. In the centre, stood two young men facing each other, playing the mridanga furiously. A lead singer stood in between these two, in front of a microphone, singing his voice hoarse. It seems that the village had rented out a generator especially for this program, in the event of the expected power cut. I wondered if this would fit in with the brief we had received of capturing ‘traditional’ practices in villages for documentation. This festival, while traditional in its appearance had incorporated so much of the modern. Clearly, the expectation that a village must necessarily be a static space devoid of negotiation with the change was problematic.

The audience of the *kirtan*, a mix of young and old, men and women, looked on as the performers sang passionately. The children were rather fidgety, having been confined to one place for too long. Some village elders sat in front, visibly engrossed in the music. The women, dressed in material ranging from the traditional cotton *khan* print to the more recent terry cot floral prints, sat a little behind. The men, clad mostly in white *kurta-pyjamas* and Gandhi caps sat dispersed in the crowd. The whole *pandal* seemed to come alive with an inexplicable energy and enthusiasm and I saw myself being drawn to the rhythm of the chinking cymbals.



I was generally taking in the music and the atmosphere, a thousand questions about this high energy event storming my mind, when an old lady with a small child on her lap smiled at us indulgently. I took my chances, greeted her and sat uncertainly next to her.

“What are they doing, *Ajji* (grandmother)?” I asked.

“You seem to be new here,” she said.

“Yes, I am, in fact. I am from Pune and will be here for a few days. All this is very new to me. What’s going on?” I tried again.

“What you see dear, is what we call the *Saptah*. We have been celebrating it for years now. It is an annual festival of around 7-8 days where we sing *kirtans* and *bhajans* (hymns). We also get singers and pundits from outside sometimes.”

“And I hear that there’s food too. Is there some kind of *prasad*?” I asked hopefully.

“In fact, there is. Through the entire duration of this festival, the men of the village prepare dinner. The whole village sits and eats together near the village school.” Her grandchild let out a general cry of irritation. She calmed her down and added, “The women are not supposed to do anything. It is the men who arrange for the programme, perform *kirtans* and cook.”

“That’s interesting. So you get to take rest for this period then?” I suggested.

“You could say so. We cook only in the morning. Although it is only for these 8 days in the year, we do get some respite from cooking,” she smiled weakly.

The mic suddenly screeched. It stopped soon and the music took over again, but this time at a very high volume, making it impossible for us to converse any further. As a result, I joined my friends to shoot and photograph the *kirtan*, and we were soon invited to dinner. The program got over and all of us headed for the meal we had heard so much about.

The dining area was laid out in the form of the *pangat*- horizontal rows of thin carpet with leaf plates lined up in front of them. As mentioned by the old lady at the *kirtan* programme, the women, children and village elders were seated first and served the meal. The men ate only after this batch was done. Since we were guests, we received special treatment, which meant a separate earthen pot of water, extra food and greater insistence that we take some more! We sat in line with a hundred

others and watched people serve the food in an orderly, rhythmic pattern. Each person was in charge of a particular dish and was to ensure that he served those who asked for more immediately. By the time we washed our hands, our plates had been served with onions and salt. Interestingly, the sweet was served with the 'main course' itself, which is when I realized that the method of serving food in this village (and probably the rest of India) could not be tied down to the restricted ways of the culinary arts. The concept of the 'course meal' was different as each caste, region, religion and tribe and its sub-sections had a specific order and reasons for the same.

The dinner was a simple meal of rice, a spicy sprout curry and sheera (a sweet dish made of semolina). However simple it looked, it was exceptionally well prepared. Hungry, I tucked into the food like a famished ogre. I had seen these dishes before but was excited to see if it was the same as the ones I had had before. In fact, these dishes were quite different from the versions I had tried out so far. The food was an incredible mix of flavours and textures. The soft silkiness of the semolina mixed with the light sweetness of sugar and cardamom...the well-rounded flavour of the sprout curry which complemented the hearty, wholesome texture of the rice. Even if someone were to run away with our treasured cameras right now, I would not have noticed!

I distinctly remember being both amused and awed by the quirky ways in which the residents of Khandgedara village negotiated with lack. In the absence of electricity, we had the powerful headlights of a truck light up the dining area. Such a simple, effective solution to the regular power cut. I wondered if I was capable of coming up with such uncomplicated solutions. Perhaps I had received everything too easily. The need to innovate had never really arisen.

One may be driven to presume that religious customs would play a very important role in the *Saptah* and that those who believe in taboos (regarding tasting food before it is offered to the gods, etc.) would be very rigid about their obedience. A middle-aged cook for the *Saptah*, shook us out of this ready assumption with simple logic. As we eyed the delicious sheera of broken wheat, jaggery and ghee, the man caught our glance, smiled and said, “You can taste it if you like. It’s not like God’s watching anyway.”



(A young man looks on as dinner is cooked)

It is these little things that bring to one’s notice the various layers of village life. As ‘city people’, we often tend to forget the diversity that exists within our villages, which extends beyond caste, class, gender, race, religion and language. There exist a million strands of belief within the same

religion or regions, for example, and to reduce all these to one monolithic identity would be to do injustice to our own understanding of them.

The most interesting aspect of the *Saptah* was the experience of a shared, ever-multiplying energy and dynamism within the village. Although there were teams to look over different parts of the event, there hardly seemed to be a disjoint or disconnect in communication. Of course, I speak as a complete outsider, oblivious to the politics that lies within the village and I also assume that the residents of the tribal hamlet near Khandgedara named Thakarwasti did not participate in the event due to cultural differences. However, the larger hamlet of Khandgedara which comprised the Marathas seemed to share a strong, common identity.

Perhaps this common energy was due to the sharing of physical space. Not only were houses in close proximity but also people during preparations and participation in the *Saptah*. One may propose that the way in which a space is organized in a community points at how members feel about each other. From what we gathered, the residents of Khandgedara shared a very deep bond with one another. Life was lived together, whether for winnowing, taking care of each other's children, farming or guarding against the infamous leopards visiting the area. During the *Saptah*, we shared our physical as well as social space with the residents. People generally finished personal work by 4 'o clock and got together to help out with preparations for meals and/or programmes. The village school ground housed temporary, make-shift fuel wood fired clay stoves for cooking. People sat, packed like sardines, in the nearby school shed, helping the men chop and clean vegetables, pulses and rice for dinner. For the *Saptah* the entire village functioned as a cohesive unit.



(Village members, including the village head/Sarpanch participate in the preparations for *Saptah*)

Although it might take a detailed study to analyze the true politics of space that operates within the village (in terms of the arrangement and timing of seating), our personal experience in Khandgedara affirmed that the sharing of physical space and food could translate into a sharing of cultures. This sharing of cultures could either affirm or negate the food (and the culture of consumption surrounding it) presented to the communities. Consequently, a positive, mixed or negative evaluation of the two cultures was done by members from both sides. Interestingly, this observation was supported with our experience of the common meals at the *Saptah*. As we sat and ate together, we discussed each others' cuisines and culinary practices, the reasons for being vegetarian or non vegetarian and the reasons for the consumption of a particular kind of food in that region. It became an ice-breaker of sorts between the two parties. The food we consumed became our very first introduction to the place and informed us the different facets of production and consumption. It pointed to the geographical terrain, climate and recent changes that may have affected food growth and consumption patterns, the impact of/resistance to globalization and the several social and economic indicators of stasis or change in the community. In fact, each day of the

Saptah brought in new topics for discussion which revealed slight variations in cooking techniques and ingredients, thus rendering their versions of ‘Maharashtrian’ dishes such as *kadhi* and *pohe* unique and distinct from the more popularized variations.

I had always heard my grandfather compare the levels of individualism and collectivism within communities. He had said that community living, though still somewhat existent in India cities, is fast disappearing due to the rising need for personal space. Of course, community living has its repercussions on privacy. But this system of living also fulfils the need for community understanding and support on a day to day basis. The one thing my friends and I went through over our trip was our constant need for each other’s support in a space and culture new to us. The three of us shared spaces with each other that we would not have shared in the city, probably due to uncertainty of the unknown. The need and willingness to support each other in unknown situations is fundamental to community living, and we had fallen in with the ways of village community life without even trying too hard. The *Saptah*, for us, had reinforced the basic human need for groups and cooperation.



Any culture, when looked at from a foreign perspective, tends to be rendered as exotic. And here, by foreign I mean any perspective of understanding a culture that lies outside it. It is most often, not a genuine attempt at exoticization but a near desperate attempt at understanding the culture in terms of one's own. What we experienced in the villages has been exciting, probably due to the fact that we were new to the things that we saw, heard and tasted. It was a journey into a unique world; a world that resembled life close to our cities in certain ways and yet seemed far, far removed from our realities.

Whether we have managed to document the recipes and culture of the *Saptah* adequately or not is for the residents of Khandgedara to decide. In spite of several precautions, a certain level of exoticization may have crept into our stories and recipes, and we sincerely hope will be excused for the same. What we can be sure of however, is the honesty of our experience. Food, for us, was truly the best way to enter this unknown territory and explore its unseen aspects. Food indeed is a complex terrain marked by expression and repression, dominance and subjugation, cooperation and conflict, and all these are reflected upon how, when, why and with whom the food is cooked and consumed.

Cooking up a new language

-Shweta Radhakrishnan

"Food functions metaphorically as a bridge across the borders of cultural communities."

-Van den Berghe²



²*Food Mobilities: Traveling, Dwelling, and Eating Cultures*

As we rumbled into Khandgedara, I suddenly thought of the Swiss structuralist, Ferdinand de Saussure. No, he was not like your kindly neighbourhood uncle and the *kaka* (old uncle) on the cycle did not remind me of him. But as I was about to enter a village whose language was alien to me, Saussure came to mind. He has written reams about how language and our experience of the world are interconnected. He postulates that language not only equips us to describe what we see around us, it actively constructs the world around us. Without a word for a particular thing or emotion, we probably wouldn't know it fully or be able to share it. His theory posits that "Psychologically our thought - apart from its expression in words - is only a shapeless and indistinct mass." The lack of a word in a certain language signifies that the community that speaks the language has not experienced it enough to construct a word or define it linguistically. Consequently, it is difficult for an outsider to grasp an idea that is put forth in a language he doesn't understand and one that cannot be translated into his own.

I remembered Saussure's ominous words as our jeep screeched to a halt in the dusty, little village. The minute we stepped off the jeep, we were greeted by Marathi words and phrases and immediately I felt I like I had ended up next to the Tower of Babel. To be surrounded by a language that you cannot fully comprehend or really participate in is quite an unsettling feeling. Not only are you handicapped when it comes to communicating with people, you also feel helpless at being unable to understand the finer nuances of their culture which are so aptly expressed in their language. As we trudged along to keep our bags in a house, I smiled weakly at anybody who spoke to me in Marathi and said apologetically, "*Mala Marathi maith nai.*" (I don't know Marathi.)

Later in the day, during dinner, the lady sitting next to me enquired whether I liked the food by pointing at the food and supplementing her words with gestures. Suddenly I felt I shared some common ground with her. Through a series of gestures and some translations by my friends, I enthusiastically told her I really liked the food and that it was truly wonderful. Having communicated that, I felt a lot less lost than before.



Food for me became an important point of interaction with the men and women in the village. Over the course of this trip, I began to follow the language better when people spoke slowly or used words that were similar to Hindi words. But I was never able to connect with people better than I was able to over a meal. Meals were a highlight of the trip, simply because here was a tangible product of an idea they were trying to put forth in their language. Food is a material manifestation of a community's culture. Unlike language where you have to know the system of signs and meanings to understand the cultural system it sets up, food sets up a more immediate engagement with a

community's culture. Which is why in many ways, food helped me overcome the language barrier in the villages and which also explains why the only words I know in Marathi all pertain to food. In every village that we went to, I think I felt completely at ease with the women during a meal. They also probably felt more comfortable asking me about food. "*More bhaji ?*" "*Is the dish too spicy for you?*" "*Do you like the Bhakri here?*" Since they knew I wasn't a Maharashtrian, they knew that their typically Maharashtrian dishes would be a novelty for me. But there was also the fear that my position as an 'Other' would be reaffirmed by my rejection of their cuisine and they would always ask me anxiously if I liked the food. At those times, I would hasten to assure them, food stuffed in my mouth, that I genuinely enjoyed their food. A lot of times, I was able to forge a connect with the women solely because I was able to point out that where I came from (Kerala) we too consumed the same vegetable or how a certain dish was very similar to a dish in Kerala. And they would smile and look happier that I was comfortable with their food. They were also curious about how a community so far away could create a dish that bore any resemblance to any dish they cooked. This helped in starting some sort of dialogue and interaction with the women and helped me to get a peek into their life and culture, if only for a brief moment. Food opened the door to a culture, that Saussure had predicted I would probably be unable to access through language alone.

Recípes

Vegetarian Dishes

1. Uradechi Dal

(Pulses tempered with a spicy *masala*)

Preparation Time: 30 mins

Cooking Time: 15 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

Urad Dal (Split black gram with skin) 2 cups

Dal Masala

- Curry leaves 6-8 leaves
- Onions 1, diced
- Garlic 5-6 medium cloves
- Freshly grated coconut ½ cup
- Coriander seeds 4 tbsp.

Tempering

- Whole Garam Masala 2 tbsp.
- Freshly grated coconut 2 tbsp.
- Fresh coriander leaves 4 tbsp.
- Coriander powder 2 tbsp.

<i>Onion</i>	1, finely chopped
<i>Green Chillies</i>	4 medium, slit
<i>Coriander leaves</i>	4 tbsp.
<i>Garam Masala Powder</i>	1 tbsp.
<i>Turmeric Powder</i>	1 ½ tsp.
<i>Sunflower or peanut oil</i>	6 tbsp.
<i>Salt</i>	To taste

Method:

Pick and wash urad dal. Add 4 cups water, 2 tsp. salt and ½ tsp. turmeric powder. Cook dal on medium heat till soft, but not mushy. Strain excess water and keep aside.

Grind ingredients for the dal masala to a rough paste. The idea is to avoid a smooth paste to ensure a slight texture.

Heat 4 tbsp. oil in a deep heavy bottomed pan on medium flame. Add half the chopped onion to the oil and fry till they turn translucent. Add the masala and fry till the coconut begins to release oil. Add the boiled dal and stir till it comes together. Add salt, 1 tsp. turmeric powder, two tbsp. of coriander leaves and strained water (and a little extra if necessary) and boil.

Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a tempering pan and add the remaining onion, whole garam masala, grated coconut and coriander leaves. Fry until slightly golden and add the coriander powder. Take it off heat and stir into simmering dal.

Serve hot with *bhakri* or *poli*.

2. Kulithache Shengoli Bhaji

(Noodles made of horse gram flour cooked in a spicy curry)

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 20 mins

Serves 4-5

Ingredients:

For noodles:

- Horse gram flour/ *Kulith* flour 1 cup
- Red chilli powder ½ tsp
- Turmeric ¼ tsp
- Garlic 1 clove, crushed
- Fresh coriander 1-2 tbsp., finely chopped
- Salt To taste
- Water ¼ cup

For gravy:

- Onion 1 small, finely chopped
- Poppy seeds 1 tbsp

- Desiccated coconut 3-4 tbsp
- Red chilli powder 1 tbsp
- Turmeric powder ½ tsp
- Coriander powder 1 tbsp
- Ginger-garlic paste 1 tbsp
- Cumin seed powder 1 tbsp
- Garam masala ½ tbsp
- Oil 3-4 tbsp
- Cumin seeds 1 tsp
- Fresh coriander 1-2 tsp., finely chopped
- Salt To taste
- Warm water As required

Method:

Take kulith (horse gram) flour in a bowl. Add all ingredients for the noodles and mix well. Add water little by little to bring ingredients together to make a tight dough. Knead the dough till smooth. Keep aside for ten minutes.

Grease a smooth rolling surface lightly. Shape the dough into a longish cylinder. Apply adequate pressure on one end of the dough with one hand and roll the dough out to make 2-3 inch long

noodles, approx. ½ an inch in diameter. Repeat procedure with entire dough and keep the prepared noodles aside.

Roast the coconut and poppy seeds in a shallow pan on medium heat one by one to a light brown colour. Grind them to a fine paste. Add a little water if required. Fry the onion till it turns light brown and keep aside. In a heavy bottomed pan, heat 2 tbsp. oil, add cumin seeds and fry till they crackle. Add the onion paste and sauté for 1-2 mins. To this, add the coconut and poppy seed paste and sauté till it begins to release oil from the sides. Stir in the ginger-garlic paste and cook for 1-2 mins. Add turmeric powder, red chilli powder, cumin seed powder, coriander powder and salt one by one, stirring continuously. Pour in enough water to achieve a gravy-like consistency. Add a little more since the *shingole*/noodles will be cooked in the same gravy. Add the garam masala, stir once and put the noodles into the gravy one by one. Lower the heat, cover with a lid and let it simmer for a while. Stir lightly every 5-7 mins. After 15-20 mins, check if the *shingole*/noodles are cooked by taking one out and breaking it in the middle. Once cooked, it will look soft and there will be no trace of raw dough inside. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

Serve with hot chapatis or bhakri.

3. Usal

(A spicy, protein-packed sprout curry)

Preparation time: 10 mins (with ready sprouts)

Cooking time: 20 mins

Serves 4-5

Ingredients:

<i>Sprouted Green gram/Moong OR Sprouted Moth bean/Matki</i>	<i>2 cups</i>
<i>Fresh coconut</i>	<i>1 tbsp</i>
<i>Green chillies</i>	<i>2-3, slit</i>
<i>Jaggery</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Ginger, finely chopped</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Garlic, finely chopped</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Onions, finely chopped</i>	<i>¼ cup</i>
<i>Tomatoes, finely chopped</i>	<i>2 tbsp</i>
<i>Fresh coriander leaves,</i>	<i>2 tsp, finely chopped</i>
<i>Turmeric powder</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Kala masala/Goda masala</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Mustard seeds</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Curry leaves</i>	<i>4-5</i>
<i>Asafoetida</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Oil</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>To taste</i>

Method:

Wash *moong/matki* (green gram/moth bean) thoroughly and put in a moist cloth. Tie the cloth and let it rest for 2 days. Check on the cloth from time to time and ensure that it is moist. Once sprouted, wash them under running water. Alternatively, use ready to use sprouts.

Heat oil and add mustard seeds, curry leaves and asafoetida. Add finely chopped garlic and ginger onion, green chillies and cook till the onions turn translucent. Add sprouted *moong/matki*, turmeric, a cup of water, salt, and *kala/goda masala*. Cover and cook for some time. Add jaggery and tomatoes and cook for another ten minutes till both are thoroughly mixed into the gravy. Garnish with coconut and coriander leaves. Serve hot with rice or chapati.

4. Vangi Batatyacha Rassa

(A spicy brinjal and potato curry that tingles the taste buds)

Preparation Time: 10 mins

Cooking Time: 20 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Brinjal (medium)</i>	<i>1, cubed</i>
<i>Onion (large)</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Potato (large)</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Tomato (large)</i>	<i>2 (roughly chopped)</i>
<i>Ginger</i>	<i>1 inch (finely chopped)</i>
<i>Garlic</i>	<i>3-4 cloves (finely chopped)</i>
<i>Turmeric powder</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Red chilli powder</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Green chillies</i>	<i>1-2</i>
<i>Curry leaves</i>	<i>4-5</i>
<i>Coriander leaves (finely chopped)</i>	<i>3-4 tbsp</i>
<i>Mustard seeds</i>	<i>1/2 tsp</i>

<i>Asafoetida</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Jaggery</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Powdered peanuts</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>To taste</i>
<i>Peanut oil</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>

Method:

Boil potatoes in salt water till half cooked. Drain excess water and allow them to cool. Peel and cube the potatoes.

Heat peanut oil in a pan. Add mustard seeds once the oil is adequately hot. When the mustard seeds begin to splutter, add curry leaves, asafoetida and garlic. Sauté the garlic till it begins to turn light brown. Add the chopped onion, ginger and green chillies and stir nicely. Once the mixture comes together and turns slightly creamy, add the cubed brinjal and stir thoroughly. Toss in the roughly chopped tomatoes after the brinjal is half cooked. Cover and cook for 5-10 mins. Add turmeric, salt and jaggery once the tomatoes have melted and stir well. Add potato pieces and water, cover and cook some more. Add the powdered peanuts and cook till the gravy thickens and the brinjal and potato are completely cooked, but not too soft. Garnish with chopped coriander and serve with hot chapatis.

Note: Variations may be made by eliminating brinjal to make a simple potato curry or replacing the brinjal with drumsticks or cauliflower.

5. Methichi Patal Bhaji

(Fenugreek leaves cooked in a mild peanut curry)

Preparation time- 15 mins

Cooking time: 15 mins

Serves 4-5

Ingredients:

<i>Fenugreek leaves</i>	<i>250 gm</i>
<i>Garlic</i>	<i>2-3 cloves, finely chopped</i>
<i>Green chillies</i>	<i>1-2, slit</i>
<i>Mustard seeds</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Cumin seeds</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Turmeric powder</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Roasted powdered peanuts</i>	<i>1 tbsp</i>
<i>Lemon juice</i>	<i>1 tbsp</i>
<i>Water</i>	<i>½ cup</i>
<i>Oil</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>To taste</i>

Method:

Wash fenugreek leaves and drain the water. Chop the leaves, though not too finely (so as to avoid the subji from going bitter)

Heat oil in a pan, add cumin and mustard seeds and allow to splutter. Add turmeric powder and green chillies. Now add the leaves, stir and cook for 2 mins. Add water, cover and allow the leaves to cook. After the leaves are $\frac{3}{4}$ cooked, add powdered peanuts. This lends the gravy a thicker consistency. Season with salt and sugar as per taste. Add the lemon juice, stir and serve hot with *bhakri*.

Note: A *patal bhaji* is any vegetable cooked in a curry. A thin gravy of fenugreek leaves is made in Maharashtra so as to feed more mouths with the same amount of vegetable. The leaves wilt and overall reduce in quantity when cooked. Hence, fenugreek is affordable to many even in the drier, poorer regions of Maharashtra.

6. Kadhi

(A Bengal gram flour and yoghurt curry tempered with spices that lend a delectable flavour.)

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 20 mins

Serves: 4-5

Ingredients:

<i>Bengal gram flour/Besan</i>	<i>2 tbsp</i>
<i>Sour Yoghurt/Curd</i>	<i>2 cups</i>
<i>Ginger paste</i>	<i>1 tbsp</i>
<i>Garlic paste</i>	<i>1 tbsp</i>
<i>Kokam*/Aamsool</i>	<i>2 pieces</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Green chillies</i>	<i>2-3, slit</i>
<i>Turmeric powder</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Mustard seeds</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Curry leaves-</i>	<i>5-6</i>
<i>Fresh coriander leaves (chopped)</i>	<i>1-2 tsp</i>
<i>Vegetable/Sunflower Oil</i>	<i>1-2 tbsp</i>

Salt

To taste

Water

2 cups

Method:

Whip the yoghurt. Add a little bit to the gram flour/*besan* and make a smooth paste removing visible lumps. Now add the remaining yoghurt and mix thoroughly. Add approx. 2 cups of water, turmeric powder, salt and sugar. Heat oil, add mustard seeds, green chillies and curry leaves. When the mustard seeds and curry leaves crackle, add ginger paste, garlic paste,. Cook for some time and then pour in the gram flour and yoghurt mixture. Cook it on slow heat stirring continuously until the mixture acquires a slightly thick consistency. When the gram flour is almost done, toss in the *kokam* pieces and boil on low heat for 5-10 more minutes. Taste to see if the gram flour is cooked completely.

Garnish with coriander leaves and serve with hot steamed rice.

Note: *Kokam* is a sour acidic fruit that grows especially along the Western coast of India. The skin and pulp is used in curries, sherbets, etc. and the oil is valuable for its medicinal qualities.

Kadhi may be made in differently in different parts of the country (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, etc.). Some variations do not use *kokam* extract since one sour agent (yoghurt) is already present.

7. Batatyachi Bhaji

(An easy to make potato dish)

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 10 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Potatoes (medium sized)</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Onion (large)</i>	<i>1, sliced</i>
<i>Mustard seeds</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Asafoetida</i>	<i>a</i>
<i>½ tsp</i>	
<i>Turmeric Powder</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Curry Leaves</i>	<i>5-6</i>
<i>Red Chilli powder</i>	<i>2 tbsp</i>
<i>Fresh coriander leaves (chopped)</i>	<i>4 tbsp</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>To taste</i>
<i>Oil</i>	<i>4 tbsp</i>

Method:

Heat 3 tbsp of oil in a wok. Test the oil for heat by tossing in a mustard seed. It should crackle immediately on contact with oil. Sprinkle in the mustard seeds, curry leaves, ½ tsp turmeric and asafoetida. Stir briefly and add the sliced onion. Allow the onions to turn translucent and add the potatoes. Stir carefully so as not to mash the already soft potatoes. Add red chilli powder and salt and stir. Add one tbsp of oil if the potatoes begin to stick to the sides of the wok. Sprinkle in chopped coriander leaves just before turning off the heat and mix well. Serve hot with poli or puri (puffed Indian bread).

8. Pohe

(A popular breakfast item from Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh)

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 10 mins

Serves -4-5

Ingredients:

Thick Flattened Rice/Poha 2 cups

Onion, medium 1, finely sliced

Peanuts 1 tbsp

For Tempering:

- Mustard seeds 1 tsp
- Cumin Seeds 1 tsp
- Asafoetida ½ tsp
- Turmeric Powder 1 tsp
- Curry Leaves 5-6
- Green Chillies 3-4, slit
- Vegetable Oil 3-4 tbsp
- Salt To taste
- Sugar 1 tbsp

- Lemon Juice

1 ½ tsp

For Garnishing:

- Chopped coriander
- Grated fresh coconut
- (Number 0) Thin Sev (deep fried Bengal gram flour noodles)

Method:

Put flattened rice into a colander/sieve. Wash and rinse very gently under running water so as to avoid breaking the rice flakes. Allow the water to drain out completely. You may mix in half a tsp of turmeric powder, salt and sugar to allow for easier mixing at a later stage.

In a non-stick frying pan heat 3 tablespoons vegetable oil. Add mustard seeds, cumin seeds, asafoetida and ½ tsp turmeric powder. Toss in curry leaves and green chillies. Fry for few seconds. Turn down the heat to medium. Add sliced onion and fry till golden brown. Add pea nuts toss well. Add the washed flattened rice and stir well. Ensure that all the fried onion is spread evenly. Cover the pan and let it cook for few minutes. Add lemon juice and stir once more. Garnish with chopped coriander/grated fresh coconut/lemon wedges/sev or all of the above. Serve hot.

9. Sheera (Suji/Rava)

(A delectable blend of semolina, milk, sugar and nuts)

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 15 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Semolina or Rava/ Suji</i>	<i>2 cups</i>
<i>Sugar</i>	<i>1 ½ cups</i>
<i>Lukewarm Water</i>	<i>4 cups</i>
<i>Clarified butter or ghee</i>	<i>½ cup</i>
<i>Almonds and Cashew nuts, sliced</i>	<i>¼ cup</i>
<i>Raisins (optional)</i>	<i>2 tbsp</i>
<i>Cardamom powder</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>

Method:

Dry roast the semolina till it releases a mild aroma and begins to turn slightly pink. Add ghee. Roast again until the ghee is released on sides of the pan and the semolina turns light brown. Add lukewarm water and sugar. Toss in two-thirds of the chopped nuts and raisins and sprinkle in the cardamom powder. Keep stirring till it becomes a glossy, semi-liquid mixture. Garnish with remaining almonds and cashews. Serve hot.

Note: Sheera is also known as *halwa* and is can be made of several things including semolina (*suji/rava*), broken wheat/bulgur (*daliya*), Split skinless green gram (*moong dal*), etc. Ingredients such as jaggery, saffron, cardamom, and dry fruits may be used in different combinations. One variation has been given below.

Daliya Sheera

Serves – 4

Preparation time: 10 mins

Cooking time: 20-25 mins

Ingredients:

<i>Broken wheat/bulgur (daliya)</i>	<i>2 cups</i>
<i>Jaggery</i>	<i>1 ½ - 2 cups</i>
<i>Mixed dry fruits (depending on choice and availability)</i>	<i>½ cup</i>
<i>Clarified butter/ghee</i>	<i>4 tbsp</i>
<i>Cardamoms</i>	<i>2-3, roughly crushed</i>
<i>Fennel seeds</i>	<i>1 tsp., roughly crushed</i>
<i>Lukewarm water</i>	<i>4 ½ cups</i>

Method:

Dry roast the bulgur nicely till it releases a distinct aroma and begins to turn light pink. Add lukewarm water, jaggery, ghee, dry fruits, crushed fennel seeds and cardamom powder. Cook on a low flame till the jaggery melts and the bulgur thoroughly cooked. You may test the bulgur by pressing one between your fingers. If it breaks instantly, it is cooked.

Garnish with dry fruits and fennel seeds and serve warm.

Accompaniments

1. Khanda

(A fiery accompaniment to everyday food.)

Preparation Time: 10 mins

Cooking Time: 5 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Garlic</i>	½ cup
<i>Green chillies</i>	1 cup
<i>Peanuts</i>	½ cup
<i>Oil (sunflower or peanut oil)</i>	4 tbsp
<i>Salt</i>	2 tsp

Method:

Grind all the ingredients to a coarse mixture. Fry the mixture over a little oil till it comes together.

Serve with *bhakri/poli* and diced onions.

2. Maaswadi

(A Bengal gram flour roll stuffed with powdered peanuts and onions.)

Preparation Time: 15 mins

Cooking Time: 15 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

Outer covering:

Bengal Gram flour/ <i>Besan</i>	2 cups
Red Chilli powder	2 tsp
Cumin powder	2 tsp
Turmeric Powder	½ tsp
Sunflower/ Peanut Oil	2 tbsp
Salt	To taste
Warm water	As required

Filling:

Onions	½ cup, chopped
Peanuts	¼ cup
Chopped coriander leaves	4 tbsp

Cumin seeds	1 tsp
Red Chilli powder	1 tsp
Salt	To taste

Method:

Combine ingredients for the filling and add two drops of water. Mix well and keep aside.

Mix the ingredients for the outer covering. Add warm water little by little to form a smooth dough. Grease a flat surface. Collect the dough into a smooth ball and place on the surface. Flatten the dough with your hand starting from the side and moving towards the centre till the dough is flattened out to approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ cm.

Place the filling along a line along the centre of the flattened dough and roll carefully.

Place the roll in a steamer and steam for 20 minutes or until cooked.

Garnish with chopped coriander leaves. Serve hot.

3. Onion Chutney

(A popular accompaniment to bhakris; a coarsely ground chutney with a robust flavour)

Preparation time: 5 mins

Cooking time: 10 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Onions, peeled and diced</i>	<i>1 cup</i>
<i>Garlic</i>	<i>5 cloves</i>
<i>Split Bengal Gram/Chana dal</i>	<i>2 tbsp</i>
<i>Red chillies, medium</i>	<i>3-4</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>To taste</i>

For Tempering:

Mustard seeds	1 tsp
Curry leaves	5-6
Oil	6 tbsp

Method:

Heat 4 tbsp of oil. Fry the chillies, split Bengal gram/*chana dal*, garlic and the onions till golden brown. Add salt and grind to a coarse mixture. Splutter mustard seeds in 2 tbsp of oil and curry leaves in oil and pour on the mixture. Mix thoroughly and serve.

Note: Some variations use sour agents such as tamarind and lemon juice. If using tamarind, add the pulp before grinding the mixture. If using lemon juice, add a dash just before tempering.

Non-Vegetarian Dishes

1. Gaoran Kombadicha Rassa

(A rustic curry village style chicken curry)

Preparation time: 15 mins

Cooking time: 25 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Whole chicken</i>	<i>1 kg, cut into 2 ½ inch pieces</i>
<i>Onions</i>	<i>2 medium, roughly chopped</i>
<i>Ginger</i>	<i>2 inch, roughly chopped</i>
<i>Garlic</i>	<i>7-8 cloves, crushed</i>
<i>Red chillies</i>	<i>2-3</i>
<i>Coriander seeds</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Turmeric</i>	<i>1 tsp</i>
<i>Desiccated coconut</i>	<i>2-3 tsp</i>
<i>Roasted whole Bengal gram</i>	<i>2tsp</i>
<i>Whole garam masala:</i> <i>(2 green cardamoms, 4-5 peppercorns, 2 bay leaves, 1/2 inch cinnamon, 4-5 cloves)</i>	

<i>Tomatoes (medium)</i>	<i>2, roughly chopped</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>To taste</i>
<i>Oil</i>	<i>4-5 tsp</i>
<i>Water</i>	<i>2 cups</i>

Method:

Heat a shallow pan. Roast the whole Bengal gram till light brown. Cool and grind to a coarse powder. Roast all ingredients of the whole *garam masala*, except the bay leaves. Wait for it to release a well-rounded aroma and then take it off heat. Cool all the ingredients and grind them to a fine powder. Lightly fry the coconut, coriander seeds & red chillies in ½ tsp of oil. Make a rough paste once cool. In another pan, fry chopped garlic, ginger and half the chopped onions and till brown. Cool and grind to a rough paste.

Pressure-cook the chicken pieces with salt, turmeric and 2 cups of water. Turn off the heat just before the chicken is completely cooked.

Heat 4 tsp of oil in a deep pan. Toss in bay leaves and the rest of the onion. Once the onion turns golden, add garlic, ginger and onion paste. Fry a little and then add the coconut-coriander seed-chilli paste. Fry the masala till it begins to release oil on the sides. Toss in chopped tomatoes and allow to cook for 10 minutes or until the tomato is tender. Add chicken pieces and mix thoroughly. Cover well and cook. Add the roasted Bengal gram powder and *garam masala* powder. Cover and cook for 5 mins. Add chicken stock as required and simmer till the curry comes together.

Garnish with chopped coriander leaves and serve with hot bhakris.

Note: Roosters/hen raised for meat in villages tend to have tougher flesh and bones, which take a longer time to cook. Hence, the need to pre-cook the chicken. If using broiler chicken, raw chicken pieces may be added directly to the masala.

Breads

1. Bhakri

(A low cal, high fibre food that keeps rural Maharashtra on the go! Made generally from Jowar(Sorghum), Bajra (Pearl Millet), Nachni(Finger millet) or Rice flour)

Preparation Time: 10 mins

Cooking Time: 10 mins

Serves 4

Ingredients:

<i>Flour (jowar, bajra, ragi)</i>	<i>1 cup</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Water</i>	<i>¼ cup (or more if necessary)</i>

Method:

Keep aside a handful of flour (jowar, bajra,ragi/nachni) and put the remaining flour in a deep plate (*paraat* in marathi). Add salt and pour water little by little, kneading so as to make reasonably soft dough. Divide the dough into four equal parts. Keep them aside. Sprinkle a little flour on a plate. Round up one portion of the dough and flatten it slightly in the centre. Now put this on the plate sprinkled with flour flatten it along a circular track till it spreads out to become a flat, big circle around ½ cm thick. Do not turn over the sides. Make sure you rotate it continuously, sprinkling more flour as and when required, so as to prevent it from sticking to the plate. The flour helps the dough to rotate easily.

Heat the stove and put the flat pan on it. Once it is hot put the flattened, round dough on it with the floured side below. After a minute or so, put little water on your hand and spread it on the bhakri on the tawa. Let it evaporate on the slow fire. Turn it over and take the tawa down from the fire. Take out the bhakri and put it directly on the fire from both sides so that it gets cooked equally from both sides. A good bhakri should puff up like a balloon with two separate layers. Once cooked, take it down and put it in a cloth so that it remains soft.

Repeat the above process with other three parts of the dough. You could break open the upper layer and add a small spoon of clarified butter on both the layers while still hot to soften the prepared bhakris. Serve with kharda and raw onion or any other veg/ non-veg dish.

Note: Most bhakris are made in a similar way. Rice flour bhakris are consumed more along coastal Maharashtra as opposed to bhakris made of jowar, bajra and ragi, which are consumed in the drier regions. It is important to note that jowar, bajra and ragi flour do not retain elasticity for more than 10-15 days. If they are kept longer, bhakris will break while cooking. One could use lukewarm water in such circumstances. However, it is better to make bhakris from freshly ground flour to get that soft texture and lovely taste.

2. Chapati

(Chapatís (Indian flatbread) are the perfect accompaniment to most Indian dishes)

Preparation time: 15 mins

Cooking time: 15 mins

Makes 10-12 Chapatis

Ingredients:

<i>Whole-wheat flour</i>	<i>2 cups</i>
<i>Water</i>	<i>½ cup (or more if necessary)</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>½ tsp</i>
<i>Vegetable / sunflower cooking oil</i>	<i>2 tbsp</i>
<i>Ghee (clarified butter)</i>	<i>As desired</i>

Method:

Take 2 tbsp. water and add ½ tsp. salt and 1 tsp. of oil. Add this mixture to the flour and mix it well. Add water to the flour little by little to make a soft dough. You may also replace the water with warm milk to get a dough that makes softer chapatis. Add 1-2 tsp. oil to the dough and knead till it makes a smooth dough. Ensure that the dough is not too tough. Keep aside for around 15-30 mins. Leaving the dough for some time before rolling it out results in softer chapatis.

Divide the dough into 10-12 balls. Roll them, add a dot or two of oil on the flattened round dough and fold into triangular shape. Roll this out into a round shape sprinkling flour under the chapati from time to time so as to prevent it from sticking to the rolling base.

Note: The cooking method of chapatis is crucial to achieve good results. Place the rolled out dough on a flat pan. Press with a cloth to make the chapatis puff up like balloons and ensure you have two separate layers within the chapati. Do not leave chapatis on the pan for too long as it will make them hard. Increase the flame after putting the chapati on the pan and keep flipping it to ensure uniform cooking on both sides. Once done, put a drop or two of pure clarified butter (ghee) and stack the chapatis one on top of another in a chapati box. Close the lid immediately to keep them hot and soft.

Beverages:

1. Limbu Pani

(A Maharashtrian version of the evergreen, refreshing lemonade)

Preparation time: 15 mins

Cooking time: None

Serves 1

Ingredients:

<i>Lemon juice</i>	<i>3 tbsp</i>
<i>Caster sugar</i>	<i>4 tbsp</i>
<i>Salt</i>	<i>¼ tsp</i>
<i>Cardamom powder</i>	<i>¼ tsp</i>
<i>Cold water</i>	<i>As required</i>

Method:

Take a medium sized glass and add the lemon juice, caster sugar, salt, cardamom powder and 4 tbsp of water. Mix well to make a syrup. Remove any visible lumps. Top up the glass with water. Garnish with mint leaves. Serve chilled.

Note: *Limbu pani* as consumed in the villages often uses water kept cold in clay pots which give the *limbu pani* a fresh earthy fragrance.

2. Lemongrass Black Tea

(A unique blend of fresh lemongrass, tea and sugar. Strong, aromatic and refreshing.)

Preparation time: 5 mins

Cooking Time: 15 mins

Makes 4 cups

Ingredients:

Black tea leaves (CTC) *2 tsp*

Fresh lemongrass *2 long leaves, cut into 1 inch strips*

Sugar *8 tbsp or as desired*

Water *5 cups*

Method:

Heat water in a deep pan. Add sugar and tea leaves when the water begins to boil. Add the lemongrass when the colour of the tea is dispersed through the liquid. Boil on low flame for 10-15 minutes till 1 cup of liquid (approx.) evaporates and yields a strong tea concoction. Strain and serve hot.

Note: One cup of water may be replaced with a cup of milk if desired. This must be added however, along with the lemongrass and boiled properly with the tea leaves, sugar and lemongrass. A 1 inch piece of ginger may also be crushed and added along with the lemongrass for deeper flavour. In a black tea concoction, sugar may be replaced with honey.

3. Ginger tea

(A strong, spicy tea that soothes the senses)

Preparation time: 5 mins

Cooking Time: 15 mins

Makes 4 cups

Ingredients:

Black tea leaves (CTC) *2 tsp*

Fresh ginger *2 inch*

Sugar *8 tbsp or as desired*

Milk *2 cups*

Water *3 cups*

Method:

Heat water in a deep pan. Add sugar, ginger and tea leaves when the water begins to boil. Add the milk when the tea begins to boil. Boil on low flame for 10-15 minutes till 1 cup of liquid (approx.) evaporates. The tea must have a deep caramel colour and a strong aroma of ginger. Strain and serve hot.

Basic spices

1. Khada Garam Masala (Whole)

Khada masala implies the use of whole spices. Spices may be used in several combinations, but most often include cloves, peppercorns, green cardamom, black cardamom, cinnamon and bay leaves. Each household and region has its own specific blend of spices for whole and powdered garam masala. However, the following proportions should suffice for a recipe for 4 assuming the taste of a general palate.

Ingredients:

8-10 peppercorns

4-5 cloves

4-5 green cardamoms

2-3 black cardamom

2-3 inch piece of cinnamon broken into smaller pieces

3-4 bay leaves

Method:

Use as directed in recipe.

2. Garam Masala (Powder)

(An aromatic masala used all over India)

Preparation Time: 10 mins

Cooking Time: None

Ingredients:

<i>Cumin seeds</i>	<i>3 tbsp</i>
<i>Coriander seeds</i>	<i>4 tbsp</i>
<i>Black peppercorns</i>	<i>2 tsp</i>
<i>Green cardamom, shelled</i>	<i>6-8 tsp</i>
<i>Cloves</i>	<i>4-6</i>
<i>Cinnamon</i>	<i>4-5 inch piece, broken</i>
<i>Bay leaves</i>	<i>2-3</i>
<i>Mace</i>	<i>2-3</i>
<i>Nutmeg</i>	<i>½</i>
<i>Star anise</i>	<i>1-2</i>

Method:

Take a pan and lightly roast the whole spices one by one. When they begin to release a pleasant aroma, remove from heat. Mix the whole spices and let them cool. Once cooled, grind to a fine powder. If required, sieve. Store in an airtight jar.

3. Kala/Goda Masala

Preparation Time: 10 mins

Cooking Time: 10 mins

Ingredients:

Batch 1:

Coriander seeds	1 cup
Cumin seeds	1/8 cup
Black cumin seeds/Shah jeera	3/4 tsp
Cloves	1/2 tsp
Cinnamon	2 inch piece
Asafoetida	1/2 tsp
Stone flower/Dagad phool	1/8 cup
Mustard seeds	1/2 tsp
Fenugreek seeds	1/4 tsp

Batch 2:

Sesame seeds	1/8 cup
Desiccated coconut	1/4 cup

Batch 3:

Turmeric powder	1/4 tsp
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Chilli powder	¼ cup
Oil	1 tsp

Method:

Heat 1 tsp of oil and fry all batch 1 ingredients. Take care not to burn anything. You may fry them one by one to ensure uniform frying of each ingredient. Drain excess oil and keep aside.

Dry roast batch 2 ingredients.

Grind all the fried and dry roasted ingredients to a smooth powder. Add batch 3 ingredients and mix well. This quantity of *masala* suffices for a month with everyday usage. It retains a fresh flavour for almost a year when stored in an airtight container in a cool place.

Note: Spice mixes in India such as *garam masala* and *goda/kala masala* may have several variations. These variations may be from region to region or household to household. It is used widely in dishes such as *usal* (sprout curry), *bharli vaangi* (stuffed eggplants), etc. but is used in varying quantities depending on taste. The recipes given above belong roughly to rural Maharashtra and are completely subject to variation.

4. Danyacha kut

(Coarsely ground peanuts)

Ingredients:

Peanuts

2 cups

Method:

Dry roast the peanuts in a wok. Stir regularly to ensure avoid burning. Once the peanuts acquire a few dark brown spots and are completely roasted, take the wok off heat. Cool the peanuts and shell them. Grind the peanuts to a coarse powder and store the powder in an airtight container.

This quantity of powdered peanuts will suffice for approximately two weeks with regular usage. Ensure that only small quantities are made at a time, else it acquires a strong odour when stale. The texture of this powder differs from households to households and may be ground from fine to coarse, depending on taste and traditional practices.

Our journey through four villages in Maharashtra has been a journey fuelled by the desire to explore food and to unravel its secrets. The recipes included here are mostly constructed out of conversations we had with the men and women who cooked these meals and other inputs they provided on the food of the region. While we have tried our best to remain faithful to all that we heard, saw and tasted, these are still the musings of an outsider and not the first-hand narrative of the people from the community. All we can hope is that when you dig into the dishes that these recipes guide you to, you will get a taste of what life is like in these villages tucked away in the Maharashtra countryside.

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