

MAHARASHTRIAN CUISINE

INTRODUCTION:

It is well known that the people of Maharashtra consider their food as **Anna he poornabrahma** meaning they consider anna, or food, equal to Brahma, or the creator of the universe. Food is God and should be worshipped. Apart from this, the people of this state also believe in offering their food first to the lord as a thanksgiving for all that He has given. Especially, on festive occasions, some specific mithais (sweets) are offered such as Ukadiche Modak (Ganesh Chaturthi) and Satyanarayan Puja Sheera.

Overlooking the vast expanse of the Arabian Sea, Maharashtra cuisine is largely influenced by seafoods and the cuisine that is popular in the interiors of the state presents a strong blend of the traditional and the contemporary preparations. The coastline of Maharashtra is usually called the Konkan and boasts its own Konkani cuisine, which is a harmonized combination of **Malvani, Gaud Saraswat Brahmin, and Goan cuisines**. Besides the coastal Maharashtra cuisine, the interior of Maharashtra or the Vidarbha area has its own distinctive cuisine known as the **Varadi cuisine**.

GENERAL FEATURES OR CUISINE CHARACTERISTICS:

- **Rice** is the staple food grain in Maharashtra cuisine, alike the many other states of India. The staple in the Vidarbha region hardly eat rice and their most preferred staple is **jowar and bajra**. All non-vegetarian and vegetarian dishes of Maharashtra cuisine are eaten with boiled rice or with **bhakris**, which are soft rotis made of rice flour. Special rice puris called **vada** and **amboli**, which is a pancake made of fermented rice, urad dal, and semolina, are also eaten as a part of the main meal.
- **Cereals** are also commonly eaten in the coastal part of the state which includes *Vatana, Val, Moong and Arhar*.
- The Maharashtra cuisine includes an enormous variety of vegetables in the regular diet and lots of fish and **coconuts** are used. Grated coconuts spice many kinds of dishes in Maharashtra cuisine. Coconut is extensively used in cooking and as an embellishment. *In the coastal cuisine of Maharashtra, fresh coconut is added to the dishes, while in the Vidarbha region, powdered coconut is used for cooking.*
- In Maharashtra cuisine, peanuts and cashew nuts are widely used in vegetables and **peanut oil** is used as the main cooking medium.
- Wide use of **kokum**, which is a deep purple berry that has a pleasing sweet and sour taste is also seen in Maharashtra.
- **Jaggery and tamarind** are also used in most vegetables or lentils so that the Maharashtra cuisine pertains a sweet and sour flavor while the **kala masala** (special mixture of spices) is added to make the food spicy.
- Among seafood of Maharashtra cuisine, the most popular fish is **bombil or the Bombay duck** which is normally served batter fried and crisp, while in the vegetarian fare; the most popular vegetables are **brinjals**. **Bangda or mackerel** is another popular fish in coastal Maharashtra. It is curried with red chilies, ginger and triphal. **Pomfret** is another popular fish eaten barbecued, stuffed, fried or curried. Besides fish, crabs, prawns, shellfish and lobsters are also relished by the coastal Maharashtrians.
- Maharashtra cuisine is incomplete without **papads**, which are eaten roasted or fried. A typical feature of Marathi food is the masala papad in which finely chopped onions, green chilies and chat masala are speckled over roasted or fried papads.

- The most popular dessert of Maharashtra is the ***puran poli***, roti stuffed with a sweet mixture of jaggery and gram flour.
- In Maharashtra, the regional festivals and food go together and every dish brings a special significance along with it. Among Maharashtra cuisine, *Chaat* is probably the most loved snacks, followed by *bhelpuri*, *pani puri*, *pav bhaji*, and *dosai*. The paan culture has been raised to an art form amidst Maharashtra cuisine. The famous Cold and *Sweet paan* is sweet filling and chilled.

COOKING STYLES IN MAHARASHTRA

- Maharashtrian meals are scientifically planned and cooked-the golden rule being that the cooking medium must not be seen.
- The vegetables are more or less steamed and lightly seasoned so as to retain their nutritional value.
- There is almost no deep frying and roasting.

CULINARY REGIONS IN MAHARASHTRA:

KONKAN (SOUTH – EAST):

- This region is further divided into Raigarh, Sindhurgarh, and Ratnagiri, on the coastal line.
- The cuisine of Konkan mainly comprises of fish. A special spice called *Tirphal* is used as a common souring agent in the fish.
- The gravies are more *coconut - based*.
- The cuisine of Sindhurgarh comprises various types of pancakes such as *ambodi*, which is made from fermented rice and urad dal.
- *Sabudana khichdi*, a savoury product made from Sago and Groundnuts, also come from this part of the state.
- *Thalipith* is another type of pancake usually made with a combination of rice and various pulses and is often eaten for breakfast.
- *Varieties of seafood* such as sharks, crabs and prawns are often cooked in the form of curries or even prepared dry.
- *Usals*, which are made from cereals, accompany fish curries in this part of the state. The Brahmins from the Konkan region are Vegetarians and they consume usals made from cereals.
- The food of the Konkanastha Brahmins is different as they use more of *tamarind and jaggery* to flavour their food.
- The use of *asafetida (heing)* is also very common here.
- The people from the region of *Raigarh* have a different method of cooking. They mostly use groundnut oil for their cooking. French beans are grown over here in large scale and hence popularly used in the cuisine. The fish curry is stewed along with vegetables such as potatoes, cauliflowers and brinjals. The locals here prefer lamb over chicken and the famous preparation of *sukhe mutton* or dry lamb comes from here.

VIDARBHA (NORTH – EAST):

- This region includes the districts of Nagpur, Chandrapur and Yeotmal.
- The main profession of the people here is farming and they mostly eat a dish called *hurda*, which is roasted raw jowar mixed with curd.
- The food is very spicy and is usually dry or mixed with ginger, green chillies, and lime.
- *Vada bhaat* or lentil fritters mixed with boiled rice are very commonly consumed in this region.
- The famous *poha* comes from this region of Maharashtra.
- Fruits like oranges grow in abundance here.

MARATHWAD (EAST):

- This region comprises of Aurangabad, Nander, Latur.
- Moderately spiced food is preferred here.
- Freshly ground masalas are preferred here to flavor the food
- Chutneys are prepared here out of the peels of vegetables such as *doodhi*. These chutneys have a flavor of their own and they are eaten along with the food for lunch as well as dinner.

KOLHAPUR (SOUTH):

- Kolhapur is a region in the south central part of Maharashtra. The other places include Satara, Sangli and Solapur. The people dwelling here are mostly non – vegetarian.
- This is a very dry region with scanty rainfall and people face a lot of hardship due to water scarcity.
- Crops which need less moisture to grow such as jowar is extensively grown here and *bhakri* made from it is also consumed.
- The gravies are hot and spicy with a fiery colour but the excellent taste is brought about by the mingling of the right spices in right proportion.
- The famous *lavangi mirchi* i.e., small hot green chillies come from this region.
- The non – vegetarian dishes consumed are mutton and chicken items – Mutton Kolhapuri is the most well – known of all. *Desi chicken* or *gavthi kombdi* is preferred to the regular broiler variety. Crabs that are found in the river water are also popular.
- *Poha, sheera, kurdai, malpua* etc are some of the popular snacks during the tea time.

WESTERN GHATS (THE WESTERN COASTLINE)

- The Western Ghats consist of the North – west coastline along the Arabian Sea.
- The important cities along the coastline are Nasik, Pune and Mumbai.
- The people of this region eat moderately spiced or very less spicy food.
- Bombay duck or *bombil* is a dried variety of fish which is very popular. It is prepared in gravy or just stir – fried and served.
- *Papad, pickle, chutney, and koshimbir* (salad with some coconut, peanuts, and tempering) are popular accompaniments of food in this region.

- The cooking styles and procedures of the Brahmin communities in this region (*Deshasthas, Karhade, and Saraswats*) are almost the same and have great simplicity.
- The spices are just enough to enhance and bring out the original flavour of the food.
- Breakfast consists of onion or *potato poha* or *sheera and thalipith*. Sometimes *dadpe poha* is made from pressed rice, onions, salt, green chillies, green coriander, and lime juice and then tempered with heing, curry leaves, and mustard. Main meals consist of boiled rice; *varan* (*plain toovar dal*) with some with some ghee in it; *polis* (which is a local term for rotis or flat Indian breads made from flour; two vegetable dishes, one being dry potato preparation and the other a choice of tondle, gavar, or stuffed brinjal; a *koshimbir*; chutneys of garlic or peanuts and a lemon wedge.
- Curd and buttermilk, aamtis and usals of cereals, vegetables, onions, ginger, garlic, chillies, turmeric, and goda masala are used.

SERVING A MAHARASTRIAN MEAL

- In Maharashtra, even an everyday meal consists of several accompaniments that are set out in a particular manner in the **taat (platter)**.
- The **taat vadhany (method of setting food on the platter)** is an art.
- It starts with a bit of salt at the top center of the taat. On its left is set a small piece of lemon. Then follows the *chutney* (spicy accompaniment made of ground coconut and green chillies), *koshimbir* (salad), *bharit* (lightly cooked or raw vegetable in yogurt) in that order.
- The vegetable with gravy never precedes the dry vegetable because the gravy will run into it.
- Once everyone is seated the woman of the house will serve the rice, pour a little *toop* (clarified butter) and *varan* (lentil) on it and then the meal begins after a short thanksgiving.
- The people of Maharashtra are known for aesthetic presentation of food. In formal meals, the guests sit on floor rugs or red wooden seats and eat from silver or metal thalis and bowls, placed on a raised *chourang*, a short decorative table. To avoid mixing of flavors, each guest is given a bowl of saffron scented water to dip fingers in before starting to eat the next delicacy.
- Snacking is a favorite pastime of this city of Mumbai, the capital of Maharashtra. Chaat is probably the most widely eaten food in the city, followed by *bhelpuri*, *pani puri*, *pav bhaji*, and *dosai*.
- For those looking for non-vegetarian snacks, there are the Muslim kebabs, *baida roti* (an egg roti stuffed with minced meat), *tandoori chicken*, *seekh kebabs*, and *fish koliwada*.

FESTIVE FOOD IN MAHARASHTRA

Gudi Padwa, Holi, Haritalika, Ganesh Chaturthi, Diwali, Makara Sankranti are some of the festivals native to the state of Maharashtra. And some special foods during these festival times are as follows:

- Gudi Padwa: Soonth Panak, Sprouted Chana Usal
- Holi: Puran Poli
- Haritalika: Coconut Potali
- Ganesh Chaturthi: Karanji, Chakli
- Diwali: Shankarpali, Badam Halwa, Chakli, Karanji.

- Makar Sakranti: Shengdana Chikki



Food in Weddings:

After the marriage ceremony is done with, guests sit down to a traditional meal served on a banana leaf. The meal is entirely vegetarian in nature and is created without any onion or garlic. It consists of a selection of vegetables in coconut gravy, green mango chutney, cucumber and peanut salad, rice, puris, golden dal called '*varan*' and a sweet dish like jalebi, *creamy basundi* or saffron-scented shrikhand. '*Mattha*' or coriander-flavored, salted buttermilk complements the meal, which ends with a sweet 'paan' called '*vida*'.

MAHARASHTRIAN COOKING EQUIPMENTS

- **CHHOLU:** It is a *cooking stove* made out of mud. Dry cow dung or wood is used for firing the stove.
- **THIKRA:** This is a tawa made from mud which is used to make breads. This gives an earthy flavor to the dish
- **MANDE TAWA:** This is a wok – like equipment made out of a special earthenware pot. This pot is upturned and fire is lit from the bottom. *Mande* is made out of a dough of rawa and maida. Powdered sugar and a bit of atta are stuffed in the dough dumplings which are flattened into rotis on the hand, something like the roomali roti found in the north.
- **MODAK PATRA:** This is copper vessel made for making *modaks*.
- **PATA – WARWANTA:** It is a rectangular piece of stone, approximately 2ft by 1ft on which the spices are ground with a stone pestle.
- **GUNDPONGLU TAWA:** This is a tawa that resembles an *idli tawa* and is used for making steamed dumplings.
- **KHALBHITTA:** It is a *cast iron vessel* which is used to powder dry masalas and spices. A heavy iron rod is used to pound the spices.
- **PURANCHEY YANTRA:** This is a kind of sieve. It is used for making a paste of chana dal and jaggery used for making puran poli.
- **VEELI:** This is a sickle – shaped blade fixed on a wooden block used for slicing and chopping of vegetables.

MAHARASHTRIAN DISHES

- **GHADICHI POLI or CHAPATI:** Unleavened flat bread made of wheat, more common in urban areas.
- **BHAKRI:** Bread made from millets like jowar and bajra, form part of daily food in rural areas.
- **PACHADI:** A typical Maharashtrian dish which is tender brinjals cooked with green mangoes and ornamented with coconut and jaggery.
- **MASALEY BHAAT:** The rice and brinjal preparations, flavoured with the red chillies, is commonly made during the marriage ceremonies.
- **PATAL BHAJI:** A typical dish of Maharashtra cuisine is the patal bhaji, a sweet and sour dish flavored with groundnuts.
- **VARAN:** It is a plain non-spicy or lightly spiced lentil flavoured heing and jiggery, made with split Pigeon pea (Toor dal).

- KATACHI AMTI: It is a sour lentil preparation from chana dal, normally preferred on the day of Holi.
- TOMATO SAAR: Maharashtrian spicy tomato soup.
- THALIPITH: A type of pancake. Usually spicy and is eaten with curd.
- VADA PAV: Popular Maharashtrian dish consisting of fried mashed-potato dumpling (vada), eaten sandwiched in a bun (pav). This is referred to as Indian version of burger and is almost always accompanied with the famous red chutney made from garlic and chillies, and fried green chilles.
- PAMPHLET TRIPHAL AMBAT: This is a traditional dish in which fish (Pomfret) is cooked in creamy coconut gravy that greatly enhances its taste.
- SUNGTACHI-HINGA KODI: A popular prawn dish is the sungtachi-hinga kodi, which consists of prawns in coconut gravy, blended with spices and asafoetida.
- BHARLI WANGI: This is a very traditional Marathi curry, Bharli Vangi or "Stuffed Eggplant". Whenever one feels like eating something spicy in meals, this is a favorite option in all Marathi families. It goes great with poli, bhakri or rice.
- DADPE POHE: Another variety of Pohe from Maharashtra. A simple and spicy and non fried snack at any time. In Marathi "Dadpane" means giving pressure. While soaking Poha, we cover it with plate and keep some weight on it. So it is called as 'Dadpe Pohe'.
- SHANKARPALYA: These are savoury and sweet snacks made with flour. Flour, oil , salt and water are kneaded to form a firm dough. It is then rolled out thin and cut into various shapes. These are deep fat fried until crisp.
- SWEET DISHES OF MAHARASHTRIAN CUISINE:
 - a) Puran Poli: It is one of the most popular sweet item in the Maharashtrian cuisine. It is made from jaggery (molasses or gur), yellow gram (chana) dal, pain flour, cardamom powder and ghee (clarified butter). It is made at almost all festivals. A meal containing puran poli is considered "heavy" by Marathi people.
 - b) Gulachi Poli : Made specially on Makar Sankranti in typical Brahmin households, the Gulachi poli is a heavy meal similar to the Puran Poli. It is made with a stuffing of soft/shredded Jaggery mixed with toasted, ground Til (white sesame seeds)and some gram flour which has been toasted to golden in plenty of pure Ghee. The dish is made like a paratha i.e. the stuffed roti is fried on Pure ghee till crisp on both side. Tastes heavenly when eaten slightly warm with loads of ghee.
 - c) Modak: This is a sweet dumpling popular in Western India. The sweet filling is made of fresh coconut and jaggery while the shell is of rice flour. The dumpling can be fried or steamed. The steamed version is eaten hot with ghee. Modak has a special importance in the worship of the Hindu god Ganesh.
 - d) Karanji: is a deep fried dumpling with a filling of grated coconut sweetened with jaggery and flavoured with powdered cardamom seeds. It is also known as Kanavale. It is one of the popular sweets prepared for Diwali celebrations.
 - e) Chiroti: Made by combination of rawa - Semolina and maida Plain flour
 - f) Basundi puri: reduced milk with sugar and flavoured with cardamom (basundi) is relished with deep – fried poories on the auspicious day of Dusshera.

h) Shikran: An instant sweet dish made from banana, milk and sugar.

i) Shrikhand: Sweetened yogurt flavoured with saffron, cardamom and charoli nuts.

j) Narali Bhaat : The sea is worshipped by the Koli community of Maharashtra and people offer coconuts to the sea. Sweet rice made by them using coconut with special flavoring given by cardamon and cloves. This is the special dish for the festival; of Narali Pornima which falls on the Full moon day in the Hindu month of Shravan (August).

