

TRADITIONAL CUISINES OF THE PARAJA TRIBAL COMMUNITY IN KORAPUT, ODISHA AND THEIR NUTRITIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

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Indigenous communities often inhabit the regions rich in biodiversity and collectively manage 22 percent of the earth's land and ecosystem. Their indigenous food system relies on natural ecosystems and encompasses a diverse range of local food resources, including cultivated crop varieties, wild plants, and domestic as well as wild animals. These foods are not only integral to the cultural identity and traditions of indigenous communities but also serve as a vital source of nutrition and sustenance. Unfortunately, modernization led to rapid erosion of the indigenous knowledge (IK) system. Additionally, oral transmission of their knowledge makes it vulnerable to loss. In the face of growing urbanization and unsustainable food practices causing climate change, hunger, and malnutrition; documenting and promoting indigenous culinary heritage is vital for achieving health, environmental sustainability and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Paraja tribe, one of the distinct tribal groups of Odisha, is primarily concentrated in the Eastern Ghats, particularly in the Koraput district, which is a hub of tribal population (Census of India, 2011). A variety of wild foods have been documented as being utilized by the tribal communities of the district. More than 150 varieties of wild plant species comprising of cereals, millets, wild yam species, wild leafy plants and wild fruits & berries have been

recorded as being used for food as well as medicinal purposes. Few studies have explored the indigenous food system of the Paraja community, which mostly focuses on their agricultural and biodiversity issues. However, limited literature exists on their age-old culinary practices and their significance in supporting health and ecological balance. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to document the traditional cuisines of the community including details on the ingredients, method of preparation and the socio-cultural aspects of their food system.

An ethnological field survey was conducted in Koraput district, located in the Southern part of Odisha, India (18.13°–19.10° N Latitude and 82.50°–83.23° E Longitude). The district comprises two administrative subdivisions, Koraput and Jeypore with a total of 14 blocks. For this study, five Paraja-dominated blocks namely Jeypore, Kundura, Baipariguda, Laxmipur, and Semiliguda were selected using purposive sampling. From each block, five villages with a predominant Paraja population were randomly chosen, yielding a total of 25 villages. A qualitative ethnographic approach was adopted to document the indigenous culinary knowledge of the Paraja community. Elder women (>40 years), recognized by the community as custodians of traditional food knowledge, were selected as

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Table 1. Commonly used foodstuffs in the traditional preparations of Paraja community

SI.No.	Common Name	Local Name	Scientific Name
Cereals and Millets			
01	Rice	<i>Chaula</i>	<i>Oryza sativa</i>
02	Corn	<i>Janna</i>	<i>Zea mays</i>
03	Finger millet	<i>Mandia</i> (Ragi)	<i>Eleusine coracana</i>
04	Little millet	<i>Suan</i>	<i>Panicum sumatrense</i>
05	Foxtail millet	<i>Kangu</i>	<i>Setaria italic</i>
06	Sorghum	<i>Khed Janna</i>	<i>Sorghum bicolour</i>
Legumes and Dry beans			
01	Red gram	<i>Kandula</i>	<i>Cajanus cajan</i>
02	Horse gram	<i>Kulathi</i>	<i>Macrotyloma uniflorum</i>
03	Black gram	<i>Biri</i>	<i>Vigna mungo</i>
04	Cowpea seeds	<i>Jhudunga</i>	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>
05	Moth bean	<i>Dangar rani</i>	<i>Vigna aconitifolia</i>
06	Broad bean	<i>Bilo jhata</i>	<i>Vicia faba</i>
Roots & Tubers			
01	Wild tuber	<i>Sorenda kanda</i>	<i>Dioscorea pentaphylla</i>
02	Wild tuber	<i>Targia kanda</i>	<i>Discorea remotiflora</i>
03	Wild tuber	<i>Pita kanda</i>	<i>D. oppositifolia</i>
04	Wild tuber	<i>Cherenga kanda</i>	<i>D. wallichii</i>
05	Wild tuber	<i>Pit kanda</i>	<i>D. oppositifolia</i>
06	Yam	<i>Langal kanda</i>	<i>Dioscorea alata</i>
Greens, Vegetables and Shoots			
01	Sunsunia	<i>Tuntunia</i>	<i>Marsilea quadrifolia</i>
02	Spined Amaranth	<i>Kanta Bhaji</i>	<i>Amaranthus spinosus</i>
03	Wild greens	<i>Celery</i>	<i>Celosia argentea</i>
04	Wild greens		<i>Kainria Hibiscus sabdariffa</i>
05	Wild greens	<i>Chakunda</i>	<i>Cassia tora</i>
06	Winged bean	<i>Karamanga</i>	<i>Psophocarpus tetragonolobous</i>
07	Sword bean	<i>Semi</i>	<i>Carnavalia gladiate</i>
08	Bamboo shoot	<i>Karadi</i>	<i>Bambusa vulgaris</i>
09	Mahua flower	<i>Mahuala phul</i>	<i>Madhuca indica</i>
10	Tamarind	<i>Tentuli</i>	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>

key respondents through snowball sampling. Additional information was obtained from knowledgeable household members and village elders. Fieldwork was carried out between October 2024 and January 2025, using qualitative tools including Semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect information regarding indigenous knowledge on food sourcing, culinary practices, nutrient perceptions, seasonal availability, and cultural significance. Participatory Observation was conducted to record and document step-wise preparation methods during household cooking sessions and food demonstrations. Audio, photographs and field notes were used for documentation, with participants' consent.

Traditional dishes were classified based on their nature and consumption patterns into four distinct categories: (a) cereal and millet based staple dishes, (b) festive and ceremonial dishes, (c) vegetable and pulse-based side dishes and (d) fermented alcoholic beverages. The nutritional composition (energy, carbohydrate, protein, fat, dietary fibre and mineral content (iron and calcium) of the documented dishes were estimated using standard reference values from the Indian Food Composition Tables (Longvah *et al.*, 2017). Nutrient values per 100 g edible portion were used for computation based on ingredient proportions and yield factors, wherever applicable.

Commonly used foodstuffs in traditional preparations

The Paraja community of Koraput district incorporates a variety of foodstuffs including cereals and millets, legumes and dried beans, wild roots and tubers, greens, vegetables and shoots in their traditional preparations. A detailed list of the traditional foodstuffs under each of the above groups has been furnished

in Table 1 along with their common name, local name and scientific name.

Traditional cuisines and their method of preparation

A total of sixteen unique traditional cuisines and beverages prepared using simple traditional processing methods such as soaking, fermentation, boiling, steaming and roasting were documented. Based on the ingredients used, these have been classified into three categories: Cereal and millet-based staple dishes, Festive and Ceremonial dishes, Vegetable and Pulse-based dishes and Fermented Alcoholic beverages. The detailed descriptions of the dishes are provided below:

A. Cereal and Millet based staple dishes

i. Bhata

Bhata is the most common staple dish of the community that is prepared by boiling rice. Often, a variety of pulses and millets are boiled with rice to prepare different variations of *bhata*. Semi boiled pulses like black gram, horse gram or red gram are added to half cooked rice and cooking is completed to prepare the rice variations like *Biri bhata*, *Kulatha bhata* or *Kandula bhata*. Similarly, a variety of millet *bhatas*, like *Suan bhata*, *Kangu bhata* and *Khedjanha bhata* are often prepared from little millet, foxtail millet and sorghum, respectively.

ii. Peja

Peja, a popular fermented and nutritious millet-based cuisine enjoyed by the Paraja community. *Mandia peja*, an extensively consumed dish is prepared from fermented ragi paste and broken rice. Sometimes to add a variation, broken rice is substituted by corn (*Janna*) or other millets such as foxtail millet (*Kangu*) or little millet (*Suan*) resulting in *Janna peja*, *Kangu peja* or *Suan peja*, respectively. During the periods of grain scarcity, only ragi flour is used as the sole ingredient to prepare *Lai peja*.

Table 2. Nutritive value (Per 100 g) of Traditional Cereal and Millet based Staple dishes

Name of the Traditional dish	Nutritive value (Per 100 g)						
	Energy (kcal)	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Fibre (g)	Carbohydrate(g)	Calcium (mg)	Iron (mg)
<i>Rice Bhat</i>	33.39	0.72	0.04	0.25	7.11	0.68	0.05
<i>Suan Bhat</i>	31.48	0.92	0.35	0.70	5.95	1.46	0.11
<i>Kangu Bhat</i>	30.15	0.81	0.23	0.58	6.01	1.38	0.21
<i>Khed Jana Bhat</i>	30.37	0.90	0.15	0.92	6.15	2.50	0.35
<i>Biri Bhat</i>	38.87	1.21	0.08	0.51	8.08	1.90	0.16
<i>Kulathi Bhat</i>	38.99	1.18	0.06	0.42	8.24	24.57	0.25
<i>Kandula Bhat</i>	39.02	1.18	0.08	0.45	8.18	2.25	0.14
<i>Lai Peja</i>	29.15	0.65	0.17	1.01	6.02	33.09	0.42
<i>Mandia Peja</i>	35.0	0.78	0.18	1.04	7.36	32.63	0.42
<i>Mandia Jau</i>	58.42	1.30	0.32	1.87	12.23	59.79	0.76
<i>Janna Peja</i>	34.60	0.79	0.18	1.21	7.12	32.65	0.45
<i>Kangu Peja</i>	34.56	0.79	0.21	1.11	7.14	32.77	0.45
<i>Suan Peja</i>	34.82	0.82	0.24	1.13	7.13	32.78	0.43

iii. Jau

Jau is another fermented ragi based dish consumed occasionally by the community. The preparation process resembles that of *Peja*, but has a thick consistency. During the periods of grain scarcity, *Aam takuajau* is prepared from mango kernel powder, prepared by pounding thoroughly cleaned and soaked mango kernel. Prior to the preparation, they detoxify the mango kernel by soaking overnight and draining the soaked water.

Nutritional and Health significance of staple dishes

The nutritive value analysis revealed notable variations in their nutrient composition (Table 2). The energy content ranged from 29.15 kcal in *Lai Peja* to 58.42 kcal in *Mandia Jau*. Protein values were generally low but comparatively higher in dishes prepared with pulses such as *Biri Bhat*, *Kulathi Bhat*, and *Kandula Bhat* (1.18–1.21 g/100 g), indicating

the benefit of cereal–pulse combinations. Fat content remained low across all dishes, reflecting minimal oil use in traditional cooking, while fibre content was higher in millet preparations (around 1g/100g), enhancing their role in digestive health and glycaemic regulation. Carbohydrate levels were moderate, with *Mandia Jau* recording the highest value (12.23 g/100 g), offering sustained energy release. Mineral composition showed a striking advantage of millets over cereals; *Mandia Jau*, *Mandia Peja*, and other millet dishes contained substantially higher calcium (32–60 mg/100 g) and iron (0.42–0.76 mg/100 g) compared to rice-based dishes.

Being rich in minerals like calcium and iron, along with dietary fibre, essential amino acids, and phytochemicals like polyphenols, regular consumption of millet based dishes is associated with lower risk of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, atherosclerosis and hypertension (Jacob *et al.*, 2024). Further, the

traditional methods such as soaking, germination and fermentation, helps in reducing the anti-nutritional factors present in millets, thus enhancing nutrient bioavailability and digestibility of the dishes (Khanet *al.*, 2025).

B. Festive and Ceremonial Dishes

The Paraja community of Koraput district often considered food as a sacred offering and present it to please deities, honour ancestors and extend hospitality to guests. Several sweet delicacies are also prepared and served during festive occasions. A few prominent ones are discussed below:

i. Jam and Mencha

To prepare this festival delicacy, dough prepared by kneading ragi flour with water, jaggery and a pinch of salt. It is steam cooked by unique traditional methods using an earthen pot, half filled with water and placed over *chullaha* (wood-fired stove) to generate steam. A platform is made above the water level by arranging bamboo sticks and layered with sal (*saragi*) leaves. The dough is then formed into small round and/or elongated shaped dumplings and placed over the platform and covered well with an additional layer of leaves and a lid to retain the steam and evenly cooked to *Jam* and/or *Mencha*, respectively.

ii. Manduru

To prepare *Manduru*, a mixture is prepared by adding jaggery and a pinch of salt to ragi flour, placed in a bamboo basket and covered with a cloth. An earthen pot half-filled with water is placed over a traditional *chullah* (wood-fired stove) covered by a perforated lid to retain steam. The basket is placed over the pot and the mixture is allowed to cook evenly to get the desired dish *Manduru*. Often a freshly prepared blend of ginger, garlic, green chillies, and roasted sesame seed powder is added to the mixture to enrich the flavour and taste.

iii. Anda

Anda is a fermented festive dish. Ragi flour batter is prepared and allowed for overnight fermentation. The next day, the fermented batter is slowly added to the boiling water with continuous stirring to prevent lump formation. Jaggery and a pinch of salt is added to it and cooked to a smooth, uniform and thick consistency to get *Anda*.

iv. Patrapoda pitha

To prepare this dish, ragi flour dough is prepared by adding small amount of water, jaggery and a pinch of salt. The dough is divided into small parts and each part is wrapped between two sal (*saragi*) leaves and roasted by placing it directly over an open fire. The use of leaves (*patra*) and roasting gives the name *Patrapoda pitha* to the dish. The slow roasting process gives a smoky flavour, distinct aroma and a mildly caramelized texture to the *pitha*.

During food crisis periods, few uncommon cakes (*pitha*) using *kunda* (rice polish) and *Aam takua* (mango kernel powder), are prepared as part of coping mechanism of the community. To obtain the rice polish, paddy is pounded and winnowed by traditional household methods. The finer husk particles (*kunda*) adhering to the *kullaha* (winnowing pan) are collected and used in the place of ragi in the above process for preparing *Kunda pitha*. Similarly, mango kernel powder, prepared as described above, is used in place of ragi to prepare *Aam takua pitha*.

v. Suan or Kangu Khir

Paraja community uses typical millets like little millet (*Suan*) or foxtail millet (*Kangu*) for the preparation of sweet delicacies called as *Suan khir* or *Kangu khir* respectively. The selected millet is boiled in enough water by the addition of jaggery and a pinch of salt and allowed to simmer till it attains a soft and semi-liquid consistency.

Table 3. Nutritive value (Per 100 g) of Traditional Festive and Ceremonial dishes

Name of the dish	Nutritive value (Per 100 g)						
	Energy (kcal)	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Fiber (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Calcium (mg)	Iron (mg)
<i>Jam/Mencha</i>	218.09	4.02	0.72	2.00	48.18	194.91	3.13
<i>Manduru</i>	237.48	4.90	3.92	2.64	45.71	242.37	3.82
<i>Suan khir</i>	103.43	1.16	0.69	0.85	23.51	13.86	2.90
<i>Kangu khir</i>	102.00	1.81	0.63	0.96	22.97	15.86	1.97
<i>Anda</i>	141.12	2.60	0.46	1.29	31.18	126.12	2.02
<i>Patra poda pitha</i>	218.09	4.02	0.72	2.00	48.18	194.91	3.13

Nutritional and health significance of Festive and Ceremonial dishes

It is observed from Table 3 that the energy values of ragi-based items such as *Manduru* and *Patra Poda Pitha* is high (approx. 218–237 kcal), which indicate their role as calorie-dense foods essential for meeting the energy demands for high intensity activities in tribal settings. The Protein (approx. 2.6 to 4.9 g/100 g) and fat value (approx. 0.4 to 0.7g/100g) shown to be modest across all dishes. While, the inclusion of sesame seeds in *Manduru* contributes the healthy fat (approx.4 g/100g) content. All the ragi-based recipes such as *Manduru*, *Mencha*, *Patra Poda Pitha* and *Anda* showed notably higher calcium (approx.125–242 mg/100 g) and iron content (approx.2 to 4 mg/100 g). Carbohydrate content was found to be moderate to high across all dishes (approx. 31 to 48 g/100 g), important in regions reliant on labor-intensive livelihoods. Dietary fiber, was observed across recipes (approx.1 to 3 g/100 g), contributing to improved gut health, satiety, and reduced risk of metabolic disorders. *Manduru* demonstrated comparatively superior nutritional density due to the inclusion of sesame seeds and spice pastes, contributing to higher protein, beneficial fats, and minerals. The porridges, *Suan Khiri* (little millet) and

Kangu Khiri (foxtail millet) showed lower energy and nutrient density per 100 g, attributable to the higher proportion of water in preparation.

Jacob *et al.* (2024) also made similar observation with ragi based dishes, which were found to be rich in calcium, iron, dietary fibre and polyphenols. Gopalan *et al.* (1989) observed that inclusion of jaggery further enhances the iron and energy content of these dishes. Additionally, sesame seeds, is associated with lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels and help prevent degenerative diseases (Govindasamy *et al.*, 2018).

C. Vegetable and pulse-based side dishes

Several side dishes are prepared by the Paraja community by boiling or stewing vegetables, tubers, pulses and wild greens with natural spices and minimal or no oil. Few important ones have been discussed below:

i. Ambilia sag

This dish is prepared using tubers, greens, vegetables and bamboo shoots (*karadi*) with pulses and tamarind paste. The selected ingredients are first boiled in sufficient water. A freshly prepared seasoning paste comprising of ginger, garlic, green chillies, turmeric and tamarind pulp is then added followed by rice

flour or ragi flour paste and simmered to get a thick consistency.

The community people follow the traditional age old practice of detoxifying the wild tubers and bamboo shoots prior to cooking by boiling or soaking overnight and discarding the water. The process removes bitterness present in these wild food.

ii. Atani sag

Preparation of this dish closely resembles that of *Ambilia sag*, with the primary distinction being the exclusion of pulses, tamarind pulp and rice or ragi flour paste. *Atani sag* is a dry variation with a distinct texture and characteristic flavour.

iii. Tentuli jhola and Torani jhola

Tentuli jhola and *torani jhola* are prepared occasionally using ingredients like tamarind (*tentuli*) or fermented rice water i.e., drained cooked rice water that has been kept overnight for fermentation (*torani*). The pulp extracted from tamarind or fermented rice water (*torani*) is thoroughly mixed with green chillies, garlic, and turmeric. The mixture is then boiled with a pinch of salt to enhance the taste and served as side dishes.

iv. Poiti

Poiti is a pulse-based stew prepared from selected sun-dried and coarsely ground pulses like red gram, black gram, broad bean or sword bean seeds. The pulse is boiled by adding freshly made paste of ginger, garlic, green

chillies and turmeric to prepare the side dish. The spices infuse rich and aromatic flavour into the dish. Finally, a pinch of salt is added to enhance the taste. Occasionally, vegetables and tubers are cooked along with the pulses, providing texture and nutritional variety to the dish.

Nutritional and health significance of side dishes

Among the dishes listed in Table 4 it is observed that, *Atani sag* shows the highest nutritional profile, particularly in terms of protein (1.89 g/100 g), fibre (3.8 g/100 g), calcium (94.43 mg/100 g), and iron (2.29 mg/100 g). *Ambilia sag* contains moderate calcium (24.39 mg/100 g). All three dishes are *low in energy and fat*. The higher fibre content may be attributed to the fibrous nature of the leaves and minimal processing techniques typically used by the Paraja households.

Talang *et al.*, (2023) also recorded wild plants and greens as notable sources of crude fibre, minerals like calcium and iron, vitamin C and flavanol compounds. Bamboo shoot also contributes dietary fibre, selenium, and potassium and is beneficial in weight management, cardiovascular diseases and cancer (Basumatary *et al.* 2017). Tamarind, being used in many side dishes, is a good source of antioxidants, especially vitamin C, flavonoids, carotenoids, vitamin B complex and is known to boost immunity (Kumar *et al.* 2020).

D. Alcoholic Beverages

Table 4. Nutritive value (Per 100 g) of Vegetable and pulse-based side dishes

Name of the dish	Nutritive value (Per 100 g)						
	Energy (kcal)	Protein (g)	Fat (g)	Fibre (g)	Carbohydrate (g)	Calcium (mg)	Iron (mg)
<i>Ambilia sag</i>	15.00	0.48	0.09	0.93	2.75	24.39	0.62
<i>Atani sag</i>	35.65	1.89	0.37	3.8	4.82	94.43	2.29
<i>Poiti</i>	19.24	1.10	0.05	0.53	0.4	13.40	0.64

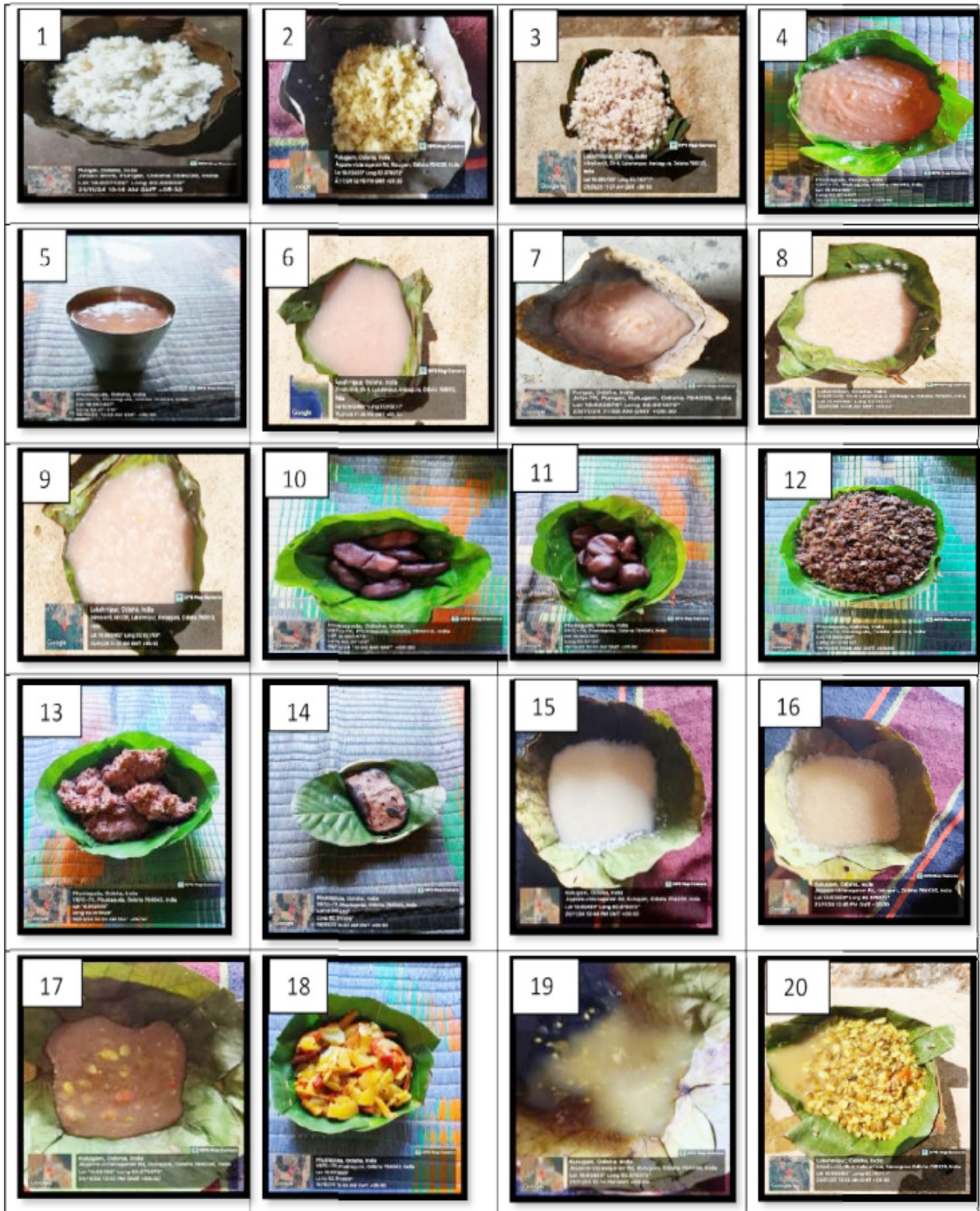


Fig. 1 to 20 -Traditional Dishes of Paraja community; 1- *Suan rice*;2- *Kangu rice*;3- *Khed Janha rice* ;4- *Mandia jau*5- *Mandia pej*; 6- *Lai pej*; 7-*Janna pej*; 8- *Kangu pej*; 9- *Suan pej*;10- *Manida jam*;11- *Mandia mencha*; 12- *Mandia Manduru*13- *Madia Anda*; 14- *Patra poda pitha*; 15- *Suan Khiri*; 16- *Kangu Khiri*; 17- *Ambilia sag*; 18-*Atani Sag*; 19- *Torani jhola*; 20- *Poiti*

Paraja community of Koraput district consumes a variety of alcoholic beverages that are either collected directly from a type of palm tree or prepared using cereals, millets or wildflowers using traditional fermentation and distillation methods. The details including the ingredients used as substrate materials and starters, preparation methods, cultural significances, etc. are presented below:

i. Mahuli mada

Mahuli mada (wine) is prepared by soaking sundried mahua flowers (*Mahula phula*) in aluminium or earthen pot (*handi*) tightly covered with a lid followed by adding a natural starter (prepared using rice flour and natural herbs) to initiate fermentation. When froth appears, the pot is placed over fire and another pot is reversely placed over it and sealed by pasting stickymud to construct a indigenous distillation assembly. The steam generated is passed through a metallic pipe fixed on the top pot, condensed and collected in a vessel kept underwater. The distillate (ethanol) is diluted and consumed as *Mahuli mada*.

ii. Landha

Preparation of *Landha* begins with the germination of ragi grains. One portion of the germinated grains is sundried and finely ground and the remaining portion is coarsely pounded and soaked overnight. *Peja* is prepared by cooking freshly prepared ragi flour using the excess water decanted after overnight soaking. The coarsely pounded part is then mixed to above *Peja* and allowed to rest for 2 to 3 days. Then the finely ground portion is added and kept undisturbed till the appearance of bubbles. The fermented liquid is then filtered to remove solids and the filtrate (*Landha*) is ready for consumption.

iii. Pendom

Pendom is another traditional fermented drink prepared by the community using rice as

its base substrate. Rice is cooked to a soft consistency and spread on a bamboomat for cooling. The starter powder (about 2 - 4%), a dry mixture of herbs known as *Pendom Osho* (*Pendom* medicine), specially prepared from roots and barks of some wild plants, is uniformly mixed. The mixture is soaked in a vessel or earthen pot and capped tightly with clothes to provide the optimum incubation temperature to allow fermentation. The mixture is allowed to rest till the appearance of cream-like slurry and allowed for further fermentation. The resultant thick paste is consumed after adding water.

iv. Salap

The panicles/ inflorescence (*kenda*) of a matured *Salap* tree, a typical variety of palm tree (*Caryota urens* L.) is cut to allow for sap secretion. A container is fixed firmly to the *kenda* base and hung from the branches of the tree by a rope to accumulate the secreted sap. The accumulated sap is collected two to three times a day by climbing up the tree. The initially collected sap is a white liquid, which tends to be sweet and non-alcoholic. After the addition of the starter (mixture of natural herbs) fermentation begins and a mildly alcoholic beverage called *Salap*, is obtained.

Nutritional and health significance of alcoholic beverages

The alcoholic beverages usually serve as recreational or ceremonial agents. The ethnic beverages consumed by the communities involve fermentation of the key substrates like ragi and rice, which produces bioactive compounds like antioxidants and probiotics in *Landha* and *Pendom* that support gut health, metabolism, and immunity (Tomar, *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, mahua flowers, used in the preparation of *mahuli*, is a good source of nutrients like, protein, vitamins, carbohydrate, minerals, enzymes & organic acids (Kumari, *et al.*, 2018). Besides all these health benefits, it is well established that consumption of high level

of alcohol is injurious to health, especially it leads to liver cirrhosis, loss of productivity, family breakdown, accidental death and so on (Choudhury, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The rich culinary practices of Paraja community of Koraput district, Odisha reflect the inclusion of locally available natural ingredients as the key component in their traditional cuisines, which offer a model for both health and environmental sustainability. Their close association with nature, dependency on local biodiversity and use of low impact cooking methods form the foundation of a resilient and culturally rich food system. The findings underscore the significant nutritional merit of indigenous dishes prepared by the community. Millet- and ragi-based foods offer superior mineral content, dietary fibre, and sustained energy, while traditional leafy vegetable preparations supply vital micronutrients with minimal fat. Together, these dishes form a balanced, culturally rooted diet that supports health, resilience, and daily energy needs. Moreover, time-tested processing methods enhance nutrient availability and food safety, reinforcing the importance of preserving and promoting such indigenous culinary knowledge for improved nutritional well-being and sustainable food practices. However, the shifting lifestyle patterns, increased accessibility to processed and modern foods, and loss of interest among the younger generation pose a serious threat to their traditional food system. A well-formulated policy framework is urgently needed to document, preserve and promote the culinary knowledge of the Paraja community, so as to safeguard the rich cultural heritage and to promote national food security goals.

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