



## Indian Aryans and Their Food Habits

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### **Abstract:**

Every community in India has a distinct food ethos. Most of these have been influenced by the Aryan beliefs and practices. Starting from north and the northwest of India, Vedic ideas gradually spread all over the country, subsuming earlier practices and exerting a strong influence in the cultural beliefs also. The Vedic literature throws considerable light on the food and drink habits of the people of the ancient India. Among the food grains, the Rig Veda repeatedly mentions barley, particularly fried barley. Of frequent occurrence is the word `anna` which may not essentially mean rice; it denotes food in general. Various types of fruits and vegetables were widely used by Aryans. A lot of herbs and spices were being used on large scale. In the Vedas it is said that, "From earth sprang herbs, from herbs food, from food seed, from seed man." Therefore, according to the great Aryan cosmic cycle, the eater, the food he eats and the universe must be in harmony.

**Keywords:** Aryan, Barley, Veda, Brahmans, Aranyakas, Neem, Dhal Chivda, Dahi, Paneer, Palak, Jamun, Gur, Laddu.

### **Introduction:**

Aryans of central Asia steppes are believed to have come into India in waves through the northwest. They established a culture in the Punjab area which took the place of the Indus Valley civilization there. While the Indus Valley culture had only a limited impact on the rest of India, the Aryan way of life gradually became the pattern for almost every part of this vast country. They were a nomadic people, essentially agriculturists and forest dwellers. They looked with wonder on all nature's creations, and developed deep philosophies of the place and purpose of man in this world.

The Aryans also developed the Sanskrit language. Even though this was not written down till very much later, a system of learning by memory was evolved. The



first work composed was the *Rigveda* which has been placed about 1500 BC. In the next few hundred years three other *Vedas* the *Yajurveda*, *Atharveda* and the *Samveda*, were similarly composed expressing Aryan way of life and thought. Following these, were supporting called *Brahamns*, *Upanishads* and *Aranyaks*. It is from these books that we learn of life in those far-off days, which in the course of time shaped the living and thinking habits of the entire country.

Agriculture was the chief occupation of the Aryans. Their first food was barley; rice soon became by far the most important staple food. The Aryans quickly learnt the use of fertilizers like cow dung, and later of oilcakes. Pesticides were used, especially the ashes of materials like cow dung, sesame, and even honey and ghee. Pastes of various kinds were employed to nurse sick plants back to health. These paste were made of the leaves of *neem*, or seeds like *soapnut*, mustard seed and linseed, or of gums like *asafetida*. These pastoral people, given in *Yajurveda* and composed about 800 BC, show the wide variety of foodstuff in prayers also.

Crops were all grown in fields, and the outskirts of villages were used to raise supplementary food like fruits and vegetables. Banks of rivers were considered suitable for growing pumpkins and gourds, and lands which frequently overflowed with water for pepper, grapes and sugarcane. Vegetables and root crops were raised in the vicinity of wells. Of course there were many kinds of meat. We read of mutton, deer meat and pork, cooked with fruit juice.

Barley, the earliest Aryan grain was fried and made into cakes and dipped in ghee for eating. Barley-flour balls coated with honey furnished a delicious sweetmeat. Rice was cooked with water or milk, or eaten along with curds, ghee, sesame seed or meat. Puffed rice was known and eaten either as such, or as a drink after boiling with milk, or eaten along with milk. What now called *chivda* was then called *prthuka*, and it was then made by flattening dampened rice grains with a pestle exactly as is done now. A dish of several cereals cooked together was called *chitranna*. The three common pulses were the three m's: *masa* (*urad*), *mudga* (*mung*), and *masura* (*masoor*). Soaked, ground and fermented dhal, especially *masha*, was made into fried materials called *vatakas*, which are the *vadas* of today. Sweet rice dishes like *kshirika* (*kheer*) were made using milk and jiggery. Pulses were eaten as they still are in the forms of soups, *vatakas*, and *parpatas* (*papads*).

Milk products were extremely popular. Milk was curdled to give *dadhi* (curd), now called *dahi*. Curd mixed with fresh milk was a popular refreshing drink. Milk solids were precipitated with acidic lime-juice, then pressed to *dadhanwat* (*paneer*). Ghee was very widely used for frying purposes. The modern *shrishand* was then called *shikharini*, and was sweetened with sugar and spice. Buttermilk was widely drunk. An ingenious method was used to carry milk, dried, and the adhering powder reconstituted whenever needed with hot water. Though ghee was preferred by the Aryans for frying, the common population used sesame oil, mustard oil, coconut oil and several others.

Contemporary sources tell about many vegetables, like lotus stems and roots, several other water plants, the bottle gourd and cucumber, the bitter gourd or *karela*, many yams and tubers, and a large number of green leafy vegetables like *palak*. Fruits included the date, mango, *jamun*, coconut, banana and jackfruit, besides figs, grapes, oranges, citron and limes. Many forest fruits, used by hermits who lived there, are listed as well.

There were also a large number of spices to be had. These included the turmeric, mustard seed, lime, long pepper, round black pepper, asafetida, cumin seed, ginger, clove and many kinds of vinegar. Fruit juices were spiced to serve as refreshing drinks. Sour vinegar was made from many sweet materials like honey, sugar and jackfruit. Another very simple soured material was rice-water that had been left overnight to turn acidic by fermentation. In fact, with a little pepper, salt and spices added, this was a popular morning drink.

Honey was first material used by human beings for sweetening. There are very old cave paintings, which show honeycombs being disturbed by men, and later being badly bitten for their desecration. Since India grew sugarcane from an early date, it also developed products like jiggery, sugar candy, and later crystal sugar. Just like today, jiggery or *guda* (*gur*) was often used in making *laddus* from sesame seed, puffed rice, roasted wheat, fried barley and so on. Many sweets were made of envelopes of flour stuffed with filling which included jiggery, shredded coconut or copra, sesame seeds and so on, and then fried in ghee. Puffs, *samosa* and *modakas* were developed then, and are extremely popular even today. Rice was cooked with milk, sugar and ghee to give *payasa*, the same word that is used even now.



Salt of several kinds was known. Sea salt was one, rock salt another, and black salt yet another. It was realized that water was frequently contaminated. Rainwater was frequently recommended for its purity. Special tanks were built in which lotus plants to purify the water. The boiling of water and the boiling of milk, were a strict part of food habits of ancient Aryans.

**Conclusion:** It is find that there were quite an extraordinary variety of all kinds of food was available to the people. Many cooking practices, which we still pursue, have come to us from these ancient ancestors of ours. In fact, it is true to say that the only food materials which came to us later on did so after India became exposed to the influence of Europe.

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