

Preserving Indian Food Heritage through Sattvik Food, Traditional Indian Food Service Patterns, and Curriculum Reform in Hospitality Education - A Review Study in the Context of NEP 2020 and Indian Knowledge Systems

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ABSTRACT

The Indian food heritage is said to be a rich body of knowledge encompassing nutrition, ethics, sustainability, spirituality, and social equity. The contemporary hospitality education in India is largely influenced by Western culinary practices, which push the local food culture and service delivery systems out of the mainstream. This is a review-based research that examines the relevance of Sattvik food and traditional Indian food service models based on the Bhagavad Gita, Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The paper provides an argument on why the curriculum should be reformed to safeguard and implement Indian food heritage in hospitality education by analyzing the classical texts, policy papers and the existing literature in the field of hospitality education.

The research has presented instructional practices, curricular reforms, and institutional approaches with a specific focus on educational, cultural, and industry-related outcomes. The findings show that the Indian food heritage inclusion is not only a culturally significant issue but also a practical and industry-specific task, given the current directions of the global wellness and sustainable hospitality segment.

The keywords: Indian Food Heritage, Sattvik Food, Hospitality Education, Indian Knowledge Systems, NEP 2020, Bhagavad Gita.

INTRODUCTION

Food has been historically known in Indian society as a basic part of human existence; the food goes beyond providing nourishment to include physiological wellness, the mental psyche, moral behaviour, and societal cohesion. Classical traditions of Indian knowledge define the concept of 'ahara' as a controlled and deliberate practice that affects individual consciousness and the order of things. Sources such as the Upanisads, compendia of Ayurvedic literature, and the Bhagavad Gita describe food as an integrative system, in the context of which diet, mode of preparation, and purpose cannot be separated from well-being and moral obligation. Taittirīya Upaniṣad (Brahmānandavallī, 2.2 & 3.7) mentions- Annam as Brahman (integrative ontology of food)

अन्नं ब्रह्मेति व्यजानात् । अन्नाद्भ्येव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते ।

अन्नेन जातानि जीवन्ति । अन्नं प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति ॥

Similarly Chāndogya Upaniṣad (6.5.4 & 7.26.2) suggest linkage between Food → Mind → Moral clarity

आहारशुद्धौ सत्त्वशुद्धिः ।

सत्त्वशुद्धौ ध्रुवा स्मृतिः । स्मृतिलम्बे सर्वग्रन्थीनां विप्रमोक्षः ॥

The Bhagavad Gita (17.8–10) mentions classification of food by guṇas (intent + effect)

Sattvic Food (17.8);

आयुःसत्त्वबलारोग्यसुखप्रीतिविवर्धनाः ।

रस्याः स्निग्धाः स्थिरा हृद्याः

आहाराः सात्त्विकप्रियाः ॥

Food that promotes life, vitality, strength, health, happiness, and clarity is dear to the sattvic.

Food is evaluated not just by substance but by:

- Freshness
- Method of preparation
- Effect on body and mind
- Ethical quality of the eater

This strongly supports the inseparability of diet, preparation, intention, and well-being.

This viewpoint is in contrast to the reductionist nutritional models that focus on single parameters, such as calorific or biochemicals. However, in modern India the hospitality education has been more or less developed in the Western culinary and service structures. Standardised methods, efficiency of operations, and globalised service standards are the main focus of professional training programs, and indigenous food philosophy and customary service systems are still marginal.

Indian cuisine is often taught as topical regional modules, which are not tied to their epistemological backgrounds and ethical principles. This pedagogical approach has led to the slow loss of traditional food knowledge in the formal education of hospitality, even though it has remained relevant to the sustainability, wellness, and culturally based service practices.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 tries to overcome such structural imbalances by promoting the use of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), experiential learning, and culturally responsive curricula throughout higher education. The area that promises to provide a particularly fruitful point of translation of these policy objectives into practice is hospitality education, through its proximity to food, service, and cultural expression. Indigenous approaches like the Sattvik system of food categorization and conventional models of Indian service can offer paradigms that are theoretically sensible and practice-focused that can be aligned with the focus of NEP 2020 on sustainability, ethics, and multidisciplinary learning.

Though the previous research has been conducted on the subject of Indian food culture on the basis of nutritional, spiritual or cultural analysis, these existing studies remain largely descriptive and fragmented. There is a noticeable lack of structured academic engagement with the pedagogical implications of the ancient Indian traditions for hospitality education. It's found that limited attention has been paid to how Sattvik food philosophy and traditional Indian service systems can be systematically embedded within hospitality curricula, instructional strategies, and institutional practices that too with alignment to NEP 2020 and IKS frameworks. This absence of curriculum-oriented and policy-linked analysis represents a significant research gap.

To fill this gap, the given study performs a critical review of ancient Indian literature, modern scholarly literature, and national policy literature to investigate the applicability of the Sattvik food philosophy and conventional Indian service practices to hospitality education. By contextualizing these traditions in educational and policy context, the paper advocates an ordered curricular reorientation in an attempt to retain the Indian food heritage and add more academic, cultural and industry relevance to hospitality education in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic discussion of Indian food culture cuts across Ayurveda, philosophy, nutrition science, cultural studies, sustainability studies and tourism studies. Although this literature body as a whole supports the ethical and wellness importance of the Indian dietary systems, it is still conceptually discontinuous and methodologically lopses. Ayurvedic tradition has always placed food as a key health determinant, with balance (*samya*), digestibility (*agni*), seasonality (*rtu*), and individual constitution (*prakrti*) being more important than conventional nutritional measures (Sharma and Dash, 2014; Patwardhan et al., 2015). Nevertheless, critics observe that a lot of modern Ayurvedic studies embraces discriminative biomedical validation which interprets traditional notions into biochemical equivalents and under-theorizes their ethical and pedagogical aspects (Hankey, 2010; Banerjee, 2019).

Equally, the Triguna-based classification of food of the Bhagavad Gita (17.8-10) has been understood radically differently. In some other research studies, food categorization is described as a proto-psychological paradigm, where *sattvic*, *rajasic* and *tamasic* diets correspond to cognitive clarity, emotional control, and behavioural consequences (Radhakrishnan, 2008; Malhotra, 2016). Some warn that a contextualisation of a moral-cosmological system is in danger of being decontextualised by these interpretations, such that a normative ethical system is degraded into a functionalist wellness instrument (Sen, 2014; Doniger, 2018). This discussion highlights a key issue in research: can traditional eating guidelines be used effectively in modern, diverse societies without creating strict rules or favouring certain groups?

The idea of this ambivalence is further demonstrated by research on the traditional Indian food service practices. Research on thali service, dining on banana leaves, and social meals highlights their environmental effectiveness, control of portions, and equality (Achaya, 2003; Kumar, 2017; Ray, 2016). However, they tend to be romantic and retrospective, with little involvement in the questions of scalability, hygiene regulation, labour economics, or service standardization in the modern hospitality setting (Bhatia, 2019; Sharma and Batra, 2021). Consequently, the conventional practices are often framed as historic objects and not as dynamic systems, which can be translated pedagogically and functionally.

The epistemic orientation in hospitality education literature in India is different. Research by Rao and Singh (2019) and Robinson et al. (2016) emphasize Western culinary science, international levels of service protocols, and efficiency of managers as the curricular priorities. Although advocates believe that this type of alignment makes graduates more employable and globally mobile, opponents think that it results in graduates possessing limited cultural literacy and situational intelligence (George, 2022; Zagonari, 2020). It is remarkable that this literature can seldom substantively address the Indian food philosophies as structured systems of knowledge, but rather puts them in the category of elective, cultural or value-added elements.

This paradigm has been formally broken by the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which suggests incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and culturally based and multidisciplinary education (MoE, 2020; IKS Division, 2022). Nevertheless, initial scholarly commentaries on NEP 2020 are still, to a great extent, normative and aspirational, focusing on consistency with policy rhetoric instead of providing specific curricular designs, learning goals, and assessment practices (Aithal and Aithal, 2021; Kumar and Shukla, 2023). This disassociation highlights a leading breach between policy vision and pedagogical implementation.

These areas of practice present 3 gaps that are consistent. To begin with, philosophies of *Sattvik* food do not usually go further into curriculum development. Second, the empirical research on the traditional service practices rarely deals with the educational theory or competency-based models. Third, the use of hospitality education reforms tends to refer to culture without basing it in classical reading, native epistemology, or evaluable learning frameworks. This division represents the epistemological level of deeper division, with Western culinary science placed in the position of a technical and universal aspect, and indigenous food knowledge in the position of cultural and contextual (Nandy, 2015; Alvares, 2018).

To conclude, the literature confirms the Indian food traditions as ethical, ecological, and wellness-relevant, but they are still not well-integrated. The lack of literature offering a methodically unified approach to link food philosophy, service practice and hospitality pedagogy is a research gap of critical concern. To fill this gap, it is

important to go beyond descriptive validation to frameworks that make Indian food philosophies pedagogically active, evaluable, and industry-competent, which is the subject matter of the current study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The qualitative systematic review method is used in the study to address the suitability of Sattvik food philosophy and traditional Indian food service systems to the curriculum reform in the field of hospitality education, as applied to the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Since the topic is interdisciplinary, involving both philosophy, food studies, education and hospitality management, the systematic narrative review design was applied. This method gives an opportunity to select literature in a structured way, and at the same time, critical interpretation of classical texts, policy documents, and modern academic literature.

The systematic literature review principles like PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items to Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) were used to guide the review process and were modified to apply to qualitative and humanities-based research in which meta-analysis cannot be applied.

Data Sources and Search Strategy: Multiple academic and policy-driven databases were used to conduct the literature search in order to have extensive coverage. The most important electronic databases were: Scopus; Google Scholar; Taylor & Francis Online; Sage Journals

Furthermore, institutional sources and official policy documents have also been consulted as well as publications of: Government of India Ministry of Education; University Grants Commission (UGC); World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Classical Indian literature including Bhagavad Gita, Charaka Samhita, Taittiriya Upanisad, Arthashastra, and Manusmrti were explored as the primary source and referred to with the help of approved translations and critical editions.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were used in order to increase rigour and transparency.

Inclusion criteria: Peer-reviewed books, edited volumes and journal articles. Laws on policy and reports applicable to NEP 2020 and IKS. Research on Indian food cultures, hospitality education, health, sustainability or service morale. Articles and books published in the last 20 years (00-24), and earlier classic sources, are also used to define concepts.

Exclusion criteria: Non-scholarly, popular media articles, and blogs. Research not relevant to food systems, hospitality education or curriculum discourse. Papers that were solely about recording recipes, but not conceptual and pedagogical studies. Duplicated or redundant research in databases.

Selection and Screening Process

The screening of the review consisted of three stages:

1. Title screening to eliminate obviously inappropriate studies.
2. Abstract screening to determine thematic compliance with food philosophy, service systems, and education.
3. Full-text context to assess conceptual depth, relevancy and contribution to the research purposes.

Redundant records were eliminated, and papers were only retained provided that they added value on at least one of the following areas:

- Philosophy of Indian food (Sattvik / Ayurvedic systems)
- The Indian hospitality and service systems are traditional.
- Curriculum reform and hospitality education.
- NEP 2020 and Indian Knowledge Systems.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

The literature chosen was analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach. Manual coding was done into important thematic categories, such as:

- Food philosophical underpinnings.
- Service, ethical and sustainability.
- Deficits in pedagogy in hospitality education.
- Policy alignment on NEP 2020 and IKS.

Instead of statistical aggregation of findings, in the review, conceptual comparison, detection of contradictions, and integration across disciplines were more emphasized. This methodology allowed to detect discontinuity in the current body of literature and develop a consistent system of ideas that connects food philosophy to hospitality training.

Rigour of the Methodology and Limitations

In order to increase the methodological rigour, the review process focused on transparency, reproducibility, and systematization of sources. Although PRISMA guidelines were used to make the structure of the review, the paper does not imply that it is a meta-analysis, as the data are qualitative and interpretive in character and text-based. The use of English-language literature and interpretive translations of classical literature is a weakness, which is realized to be a scope of future investigation.

Ethical Considerations

Since it was a review-based research that used published and publicly available sources, no ethical clearance was necessary. The original sources used were cited properly, and there was no interpretive distortion of the classical texts.

Finding

The reviewed paper demonstrates that the issue of Indian food heritage introduction to learning facets of hospitality education is that it entails not just the straightforward act of incorporating the subject into the curriculum, but rather the process is a metamorphosis, rooted in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). When it comes to the Indian civilizational situation, food (anna) is considered a sacred and ethical issue, helping to sustain physical existence, interpersonal and spiritual growth. This is made very clear in the Taittiriya Upanisad, which states that Annam Brahma (food is divine), and in this case, food forms the core of life and morality of man (Taittiriya Upanisad, 3.7.1).

The food preparation, dinner and sharing, purity and service as well as relevance of restraint, cleanliness and respect of the guest and the host are explained through official legal and family literature like Manusmṛti and Grhya Sutras (Manu, trans. Olivelle, 2005). Hospitality (atithi-seva) has been conceptualised as a duty in a phrase known as Atithi Devo Bhava. This idea is reflected in the Dharmashastric and such later cultural traditions (Olivelle, 1993).

1.1 Indian Knowledge Systems and the Philosophy of Food Indian Knowledge Systems Indian Knowledge Systems perceive food as a unifying principle that binds to individual body (sarir), mind (manas) and cosmos (rta). Ayurvedic texts such as Samhita Charaka state that food is the primary support of life (aharah prananam) and it is related to health, balance and long life (Sharma and Dash, 2001). Food is not simply quantified based on calories, and it has qualities (guna), origin, seasonality and the means of preparation, in line with a holistic comprehension of diet.

This point of view integrates the idea of hospitality education with ethical hospitality, environmental sustainability, and well-being, as these concepts are viewed as disconnected in contemporary programmes and integrated in IKS (Singh and Mishra, 2021).

1.2 Sattvik Food Philosophy: Scriptural, Ritual, and Scientific Foundations - It has been demonstrated that there is a profound connection between the food we eat and our spiritual life, as reflected in the Bhagavad Gita verses 17.7-17.13. The categorization of food and sacrifice as three kinds -Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic- shows how our food and our worship are a manifestation and a reflection of our inner self. These classes underline such states of balance, restlessness, and inertia that provide a good clue to how to live a disciplined and conscious life.

Sattva manifests as purity, harmony and clarity. Sattvic diet consists of nutritious food that is cooked in a simple and moderate manner. This enhances mental tranquillity and religious cognisance. Rajas concerns itself with energy, passion and desire. Excessively spicy, rich or stimulating foods can tend to enhance restlessness and sensory overload. Tamas is associated with inertia, ignorance and decay. Stale, impure, or lifeless foods are called tamasic foods, and they dull both the body and the mind. Similarly, Tamasic sacrifices are careless, unfaithful and insensitive to ethical or biblical instructions. Knowing this tendency will prevent those practices that may cause spiritual stagnation.

The wisdom of the Gita remains quite relevant even in the modern world with its pressures and hectic schedules. With the selection of food, careful cooking, and definite purposes during prayer or rites of worship, routine activities may become spiritual practices. The Three Kinds of Food are there to remind us that the only way we can experience permanent inner development is by making conscious, well-considered decisions that mirror consciousness, discipline and devotion. This philosophy is further developed in Ayurvedic literature, which suggests dietary methods that are based on digestion (agni), local (desa), and individual constitution (prakrti) (Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 25). Food equity, healthy nutrition, and reduction of food waste through ritualised food practices such as naivedya (offering food), release of prasada, annadana (charitable feeding), and operation of temple kitchens are expected to reduce modern-day sustainability (Khare, 2016).

1.3 Traditional Service Systems and Hospitality Ethics - The Ancient Indian tradition of hospitality revolves around humility, attending to and personalisation of service. Early predecessors of hospitality management can be found in the Arthashastra records of organised systems of accommodating travellers, ascetics, and guests of the state (Kautilya, trans. Rangarajan, 1992). The guidelines of feeding performers and guests according to the cultural role of nourishment in social and artistic life are described in the Natyashastra (Bharata Muni, trans. Ghosh, 1951).

Physiological and psychological principles upon which service rites such as eating with hands, progressive food service and sitting on the floor are founded, are meant to enhance digestion, mindfulness and social equality. This reiterates the concept of service as an ethical and significant activity as opposed to a skill (Alter, 2000).

1.4 Consistency with NEP 2020 - The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has called for the need to incorporate Indian Knowledge Systems, practical learning, and courses in various disciplines in higher education (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). Responses in the form of hospitality programmes include the introduction of core courses in Indian food philosophy, elective courses in traditional service systems and practical modules in heritage kitchens, pilgrimage sites, and community food projects. This links the studies to the living traditions, to guarantee the cultural continuity and experience.

1.5 Commercial Feasibility and Global Relevance - The issues of relevance of Indian food heritage in the market are opposed by the global increase in heritage cuisine, wellness tourism and culturally immersive hospitality experiences. Recent studies indicate that consumers are demanding authentic, ethically produced, and health-conscious food more than ever, and all of this is part of the Indian food culture (UNWTO, 2018; Bhatia, 2020). Hence, the Indian food heritage provides a competitive advantage based on sustainability, morality, and cultural diversity.

1.6 Institutional Issues and the Documentation Imperative - Regardless of its significance, the adoption of Indian food heritage is fraught with institutional obstacles that are associated with faculty willingness as well as institutional ability. As scholars highlight, the colonial interventions have relegated native food knowledge to the periphery, which is why little has been documented and researched (Nandy, 2015). This gap could be bridged by cross-disciplinary collaboration, training of the faculty, and continued research into the process of documenting, translating, and reinterpreting the traditional food systems for the modern world.

Analysis and Implications:

The analysis has shown that incorporation of Indian food heritage in the hospitality education involves a systematic alignment within the institutional structure, faculty capacity and curriculum design. Whereas Indian Knowledge Systems approach food (anna) as a holistic institution comprising of health, ethics, sustainability, and service values, modern hospitality education in India continues to be structured in largely Western lines of operation. This structural incompatibility inhibits the incorporation of meaningful use of indigenous food philosophies though conceptually there is relevance.

Institutional Feasibility

The institutional feasibility is less inhibited by the physical infrastructure and is more inhibited by the academic and administrative orientation. The existing hospitality institutions have kitchens, laboratories, and industry connections that are capable of promoting indigenous culinary training but these facilities are just organized in accordance with the standardized Western cuisines. The study proposes that it is possible to incorporate the Indian food heritage based on the modular curriculum frameworks, electives, credit-based work experience, and hands-on experience in heritage kitchens, community food systems, and wellness institutions. NEP 2020 offers policy legitimacy to such flexibility, but there are still no standardised learning outcomes and assessment structures to support indigenous food knowledge, which remains a barrier to systematic use. This points at the necessity of institution-level curriculum outlines which could transform philosophical notions into quantifiable capabilities.

Faculty Readiness

Faculty preparation is a highly important facilitator of curriculum change. Majority of hospitality teachers are trained in the western culinary and service models, which makes them have little knowledge of Indian food philosophy, classical literature and indigenous service ethics. This epistemic distance constrains the pedagogical confidence and consistency. Faculty readiness is however another capability that is developed according to the literature. The gap can be successfully addressed with targeted faculty development programs, interdisciplinary teaching partnerships, and immersion-based training in line with IKS and NEP 2020. The faculty preparation is not, therefore, a time limitation of ability, but of institutional investment and orientation.

Pedagogical and Curriculum Implications.

The review highlights the necessity to move away to technique-focused teaching to systems- and values-based pedagogy. The mindfulness, equity, sustainability, and ethical service practices are the traditional Indian food and service practices that are gaining relevance in the modern hospitality markets. It has also found that the provision of these dimensions through effective mechanisms includes experiential, reflective and service-learning pedagogies, as long as institutions and faculty are sufficiently prepared.

In general, it is possible to notice the gap in conceptual promotion and practical implementation, which is reflected in the literature. The simultaneous consideration of institutional feasibility and faculty readiness is the key to the successful curriculum reform.

Theoretical institutional Model of encompassing Indian Food Heritage in Hospitality Programmes:

According to the result of the analysis, the study suggest a three-level institutional framework in terms of the incorporation of Indian food heritage into the hospitality education (Figure conceptualization).

Tier 1: Institutional Enablers.

- Policy support to NEP 2020 and Indian Knowledge Systems.
- Different curriculum frameworks (core-elective-experience modules)
- Awareness of indigenous knowledge by accreditation and assessment systems.

Tier 2: Capacity of the faculty and Pedagogical Readiness.

- Indian food philosophy and service ethics programs in faculty development.
- Multi-disciplinary instruction (hospitality Ayurveda cultural studies x).
- Hands-on experience with heritage kitchens, community food institutions, and wellness institutions.

Level 3: Curriculum and Learning Outcomes.

- Combination of Sattvik food philosophy and conventional service systems.
- Sustainability, ethics and wellness outcomes in terms of competency.
- Reflective and experiential learning modes that were relevant to the industry.

Outcome:

An Indian food heritage that is culturally based, policy consonant hospitality education that increases graduate employability, ethical sensitivity and global relevance.

CONCLUSION

Indian food heritage is a knowledge system that is systematized and goes beyond the cooking activity to include ethics, sustainability, wellness, and culturally based values in service. This paper has shown that the Sattvik food philosophy and Indian traditional food service systems present consistent conceptual and pedagogical frameworks that can add value to hospitality education in accordance with Indian Knowledge Systems and National Education Policy 2020. The paper has critically synthesized the traditional literature, the policy guidelines, and the modern scholarly writings by examining the constraints of the current Western centric curricula in the hospitality industry and presents a methodological revision of hospitality education by basing on indigenous epistemologies.

It is highlighted in the analysis that effective assimilation of Indian food heritage depends not only on conceptual acceptance but also on institutional possibility and faculty willingness. Although infrastructural constraints are commonly held to be the first factor, the results indicate that the other issues are of greater influence, namely the administrative orientation, curriculum design, and building of the faculty. The existence of policy support under NEP 2020 creates a favourable climate of reform, and in the absence of standardized learning outcomes, assessment systems, and faculty development programmes, such integration is likely to be more of a spoken than a change.

Simultaneously, there is a weakness of the study as it utilizes secondary sources and translated classical texts, and there is no empirical support with institutional case studies or data based on stakeholders. These constraints hinder the evaluation of contextual differences by institutions and sub-sectors of the hospitality industry. However, the proposed conceptual institutional framework of this paper offers a systematic basis of operationalizing.

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