

# Tribal Cooking of Dadra & Nagar Haveli

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**Abstract:** It is important to note at the beginning itself that the tribal cuisine of Dadra & Nagar Haveli has nothing to do with Gujarati food. The visitors of Silvassa get confused between the both, as they end up eating in commercial restaurants only, and don't get the opportunity to relish the real tribal food. Unfortunately the tribal food is available only in the tribal homes of the remote areas of this beautiful Union Territory of India. The tribals here belong to different communities but they have similar character, practices, beliefs and rituals. The staple food of the tribal includes rice and ragi (nagli). They also consume kodra and bajra. Wheat is consumed less. The tribal mostly depend on their kitchen gardens for vegetables which include bhindi, papdi, ambadi and various cucurbits. The tribal mostly depend for fire wood from the forest. Mahua flowers collection is another prominent activity among the tribals. Liquor is prepared out of these flowers and consumed everyday during the winters.

**Keywords:** Tribal, Cookery, Food, Forest, Silvassa,

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tribal people of DNH make up a large part of the population, almost 75%. The most prominent are Dhodia (16.90%), Kokna (16.85%) and Varli (62.94%), with small groups of Koli, Kathodi, Naikaand Dubla scattered across the territory, collectively representing 3.31% of the population. Dhodias and Dubles mainly populate the Northern part, whereas Koknas and Varlis are found all over the Union Territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

The total geographical area of Dadra & Nagar Haveli is 491 Sq.Kms. Of this 40% is covered by forests. The forests here are classified as Group 3 B C 2, South Indian Tropical Moist (Mixed) Deciduous Forest. The forests of Dadra & Nagar Haveli have been most significant to its rulers and dwellers. Majority of the tribes are dependent on forests for their domestic needs. The people here utilize many plant species which are used for various purposes. The plants belong to various families. The various plants which are used here include the trees, shrubs, herbs and climbers. Most of the plants are having medicinal value, some are used as fuel wood, and others are used for making furniture, dyes, and agricultural implements.

Traditional knowledge exists worldwide in all communities covering varied areas including health, agriculture and natural resource management. In case of the developing world Africa and Latin America are also rich in traditional knowledge but they are to be found by and large only as oral traditions. Asia in general and India in particular have a distinction that traditional knowledge is found not just as oral tradition but also as classical literature that is written down with its own theoretical framework and with a clear exposition of the basic principles of world views.

## 2. MYTH: D&NH TRIBAL CUISINE IS JUST LIKE GUJARATI CUISINE - BUSTED

The myth that the DNH tribal cuisine is just like Gujarati cuisine must be busted by the fact that the tribal cuisine of DNH territory and even the surrounding hilly region of Dang in Gujarat and Jawar in Maharashtra are similar and is primarily build up around a main dish consisting of one non-vegetarian main dish and supported by a rice based simple dish. Additions to this off-course are in plenty. The basic preamble to the DNH cookery is availability of locally produced raw materials and simplicity in preparation. The poverty of the tribals and their inability to buy modern cookwares and readymade all-weather *masalas*, actually adds up to the uniqueness in the cooking methodology as well as in the freshness of the ingredients used. The readymade powdered masalas are not used and hence the final product is unique in its taste and much healthier too. The age old wisdom of the continued community living of the tribals have ensured that the culture

and food habits are still intact in the remote areas and a stunning delight to the modern travellers if they are willing to walk that extra mile.

The best of the tribal food in DNH is not only cooked in the tribal kitchens but they are also cooked in the open fields, or by the river side, and even in the deep jungles as well. So, the tourist who are usually on a tight schedule, even if seeking the genuine taste and method of preparation of such delicacies, are usually bumped into the superficial hotel menu boasting of tribal foods but fall much short to the original variety. The restaurant food is usually cooked by someone from Nepal or Bengal who have no idea about what's going on. However that's the story about most of the tourist places in India.

Coming back to the tribal cookery of DNH it is important to note that community participation becomes imperative in these remote areas. Most of the festive dishes require the poor tribals to join hands so that the cost of production can be met. One of the best examples is the cooking of the whole Goat/lamb. Where the whole goat costs around 4 to 5 thousand rupees (year 2018 rates) the tribals contribute money to get one. Luckily the raw materials for cooking the whole goat is much cheaper and labour is free as they themselves are the best cooks around.

*(Though a lot of Tribals here have been converted to Christianity, but their cultural and culinary root still remains intact, more or less.)*

### 3. SKIN ROASTED WHOLE GOAT IS A DRAMATIC FESTIVE DISH.

The whole goat is kept as it is without removing its skin, head or hoof. It is cleaned only of its innards like intestine, stomach, and everything edible as liver, heart etc. First the entire goat is seared on high flame created by dry leaf and wood. The whole goat along with the skin is 'dry seared' to the extent that all the hairy part is burnt and the upper part of the meat adjoining the skin is cooked. Once cooled, the meat is washed and cut into small chunks to be cooked. The Masalas that are used include only finely chopped or grounded (if possible) onions, green chillies, ginger, turmeric, coriander powder, salt and raw Mangoes if available or Tamarind. That's all, with a very little amount of oil.

The innards like the brain, liver, kidney, heart, intestines etc are cooked separately for its different flavour and texture. The masala used here is just salt, turmeric, green chillies and tamarind/raw mangoes/lemon.

The final dish is normally served with Rice rotis and locally brewed palm beer.

		
The Skin Roasted Goat	Innards and Meat Separately Cooked	The Final Goat Dish served along with Rice Roti and Salad

### 4. OIL FREE 'JUNGLEE CHICKEN' IS ANOTHER STUNNING DISH PREPARED BY TRIBALS

Commonly termed as Patta Chicken (Chicken wrapped in Leaves and roasted) is very simple but has the most pronounced flavour of chicken and wood. It is normally cooked in the jungles during their long hunting and fruit collection expeditions, with minimum of fanfare, hence the name Junglee/Patta Chicken.




Desi Chicken (Not Broiler) is abundantly available in these remote areas of the Silvian forests and villages. Getting a few for a festive occasion is as common as people having fast food in the cities. The desi chicken is cut into small pieces and marinated with a paste of Onion, Ginger, Garlic, Green Coriander, Green Chillies, Turmeric, and Salt. Small portion of around 500 grams of this chicken mixture is then wrapped into several layers of green teak leaves of banana leaves or any

large sized leaf available in the jungle there. A bonfire is lit and the bundles of tightly wrapped chicken are thrown in it. After about 45 minutes the bundles are removed from the fire and as the wraps of the leaves are opened, you are amazed by the stunning and mesmerizing flavour of the Desi Chicken cooked in fresh masalas. Just to enhance the taste even further, some lemons are squeezed on them.


This oil free Junglee chicken, is consumed along with Rice Rotis and locally brewed beer.

	
The Raw Marinated Chicken before being wrapped in leaves.	The <b>Junglee Chicken</b> Roasted and ready.

#### 5. A LIST OF SOME POPULAR DISHES WITH BASIC RECIPE IS LISTED AS BELOW...

<p><b>Rice Roti</b></p> 	<p>Roughly Grounded rice flour is mixed with water to make a flowing paste. NOT fermented. The batter is prepared immediately before cooking never much in advance. Cooked just like Dosa, on Clay or Iron Tawa. Without any Oil. The cooking normally is done just on one side but can be cooked on both sides as a matter of preference.</p>
<p><b>Naroli Chicken</b></p> 	<p>A Urban version of the Junglee Chicken where Garam Masala, Red Chilli Powder, Whole Garlic and Tomatoes too are added to make the dish much more spicy and commercial. Popular in the town restaurants and roadside dhabas. Everyone has their own recipe with varying degree of red chilli powder and oil.</p>
<p><b>Aloo Chana Chicken</b></p> 	<p>A must in any marriage function, this dish is prepared with 1:1:1 ratio of Potatoes, Channa (Kabuli or Bengal Gram) and Chicken. Every household prepares this dish in their own variety. Primarily it has Turmeric, Corriander Powder, and Salt as masala with minimum amount of Oil. The gravy is mildly flavoured, almost non spicy and thin, which makes it perfect to be consumed with Bhat (boiled rice, the thick variety).</p>

<p><b><u>Naagli Roti (Raagi)</u></b></p> 	 <p>Made from <b>Raagi Flour</b>. Method is same as normal wheat flour chapatti but requires some experience in handling the sticky dough.</p>
<p><b><u>Ubadiyu</u></b> <b><u>(Pot Roasted, Spicy, flavourful, Vegetable combo. Oil Free.)</u></b></p> 	<p>Very Popular during the winters when green vegetables are easily available. A combination of several vegetables like Potatoes, Surti Beans, Sweet Potatoes, Brinjals, Whole Garlic, Green Coriander, Yam, Green Tuvar Dal whole, Ginger, Ajwain, Little Oil...the list is endless....and can contain Chicken as well, but very rare.</p> <p>A spicy green Chutney paste is prepared and all the vegetables are smeared with it. All the stuff is placed in a Clay Jar/pot and sealed from the top. This pot is roasted on slow open fire for about one hour.</p> <p>The roasted spicy and aromatic vegetables are served along with green chutney made from Green chillies, Green Garlic, garlic salt and oil.</p>
<p><b><u>Whole Tuvar Dal (curry or dry)</u></b></p> 	<p>Whole Tuvar Dal (round with skin) is cooked either in gravy style like dal or dry like a vegetable dish. Very nutritious, simple preparation and much cheaper when compared to the commercial split dal.</p>
<p><b><u>Bamboo Shoot Chicken</u></b></p> 	<p>Bamboo shoots are available fresh only during the Monsoon Season. So they are pickled in salt water for all year usage. Bamboo shoots can be consumed as a vegetable or more popularly cooked along with Desi chicken to make a protein-fibre combo. Only basic masalas are used keeping in mind that a prolonged slow fire cooking gives the best of the result. Imp: Bamboo shoots are poisonous hence maximum care is take in its preparation.</p>

<b><u>Lapsi</u></b>	Daliya or pounded wheat cooked in water and sugar or palm jaggery. Great source of protein and energy for the hard working tribal.
<b><u>Bhokar fruits Pickle</u></b> <b><u>(Gumberry Eng.) (Gunda Hindi)</u></b> 	Wash and dry Bhokars with a cloth. Remove the stem and make a cross slit on the top. Take a chop stick, dip it in salt, stick it in the fruit through the slit and scrape the seed out of the fruit. Once the gum berry is deseeded, apply salt inside using the chop stick. Repeat this process for all the fruit. Prepare spice mix by combining together the ingredients (Fenugreek seeds, Mustard seeds, Red chili powder, Salt, Asafetida). Add little oil to the spice mix to get crumb like consistency. This will help spice mix stick to the fruits. Fill 3/4th of the fruits with the spice mix through the slit. Keep the remaining spice mix for further addition. Heat some oil and cook the fruits for 40 minutes along with the remaining spices. Once the fruits are fully cooked, let them cool naturally. The pickle is ready to eat. Stored it in cool and dry place and avoid the direct sunlight.
<b><u>Others</u></b>	Tribal communities consume wild tubers, rhizomes and corms either in raw or baked or boiled or roasted form. Tender shoots, flowers, leaves, pods, young fruits, etc.

## 6. BAMBOO SHOOT: A POISONOUS DELICACY

The Tribal population may be closer to modern ways of life now, but in the bygone centuries they were completely dependent on the nature for their every requirement. Food as the basic necessity was the most important need and all attention was given for its procurement from the available resources in the forest. Hence, the food habits of the tribes are largely developed from their constant fight for survival as food was not plenty in the Non Rainy seasons. Several food alternatives came to their kitchens, primarily due to the necessity to have alternate food in the dry seasons of this dry and semi arid forest of their dwellings.

Bamboo Shoot is an interesting food alternate which pops as an option when no other green fibre is available for consumption. However, the problem here is that bamboo if consumed in its raw form is poisonous and can kill animals and humans. The tribals discovered long back that the bamboo shoots which are obtained during the rainy seasons (monsoons) can be consumed if cooked cautiously. The shoot chunks are soaked in water overnight and the waste poisonous water discharged in a pit so that no animal may drink it accidentally. The shoots are then boiled for over one hour and the water drained again. The shoots are then considered ready to be used as a raw material to be used as an independent vegetable dish or as a combination like chicken or mutton.

The most logical thing the tribals did was to preserve the bamboo shoots obtained during the rains and use them after the rains when there used to be scarcity of fresh vegetables. The preservation of the de-toxicated bamboo shoots is done by keeping them dipped in brine solution, i.e. salt water solution.

The DNH tribes use black bamboo and not the yellow variety of bamboo for eating. The yellow variety which is having a pronounced pungent smell is more popular with the tribes of the Assam region of India. The consumption of bamboo shoots and several such vegetation and burrow animals, have originated from necessity and poverty. So, today as the tribes get more prosperous with government help, these delicacies are to be found only in the remote villages of the tribal forests.

## 7. METHODOLOGY

Season wise frequent field visits were organized between the periods of July 2014 to May 2018 in the different villages of the Union Territory of Dadra & Nagar Haveli, situated on the borders of Gujarat and Maharashtra states of India. The local, efficient, knowledgeable and bilingual mediators were identified in order to understand and collect the traditional information of the food habits and crops from the farmers and also from the “Bhagats” who are traditional medical

practitioners among the tribal population. Information was collected through interviews and writing of recipes as made available from the tribal villages. Informed consents of interviewed individuals were obtained. Interviews of minimum two and maximum of five farmers of each village were collected.

Collected recipes and data were confirmed and compiled by repeated visits. The Tribal food was prepared personally by me in the presence and by the help of the local villagers. The cooking trials were done at different times and seasons thought the last four years of the study period. The cooking included locations such as the home kitchen of the villagers, open area cooking in the farms, forest cooking by using all resources in the forest only, and cooking during festive occasions such as Marriages/Holi/Diwali/Christmas etc. and personal cooking experiences.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first attempt to assemble the tribal food and eating culture of the region done as done by me. Though a lot of Tribals in Silvassa remotes have converted to Christianity, but their cultural and culinary roots still remains intact, more or less. Tribal people are believed to be the closest to nature. They consume foods with very minimal processing, and the duration from the field to the plate is less, hence the bio-availability of nutrients is very high." This wisdom available with the tribe is transmitted only through oral communication in locally-spoken, script-less language and therefore needs conservation. Though the tribals belong to the different communities, they have similar character, practices, beliefs and rituals. The staple food of the tribal's includes rice and ragi (nagli). They also consume kodra and bajra. Wheat is consumed infrequently. The tribals mostly depend on their kitchen gardens for vegetables which include bhindi, papdi, ambadi and various cucurbits. The tribal mostly depend for fire wood on the forest. Mahua flower collection is another prominent activity among the tribal. Liquor is prepared out of these flowers and consumed everyday during the winters.

### SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:

*This research in NO way a conclusive study on all the food and eating habits of the Tribal population of the Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli.* Further, many more research may be done as no credible work has been done on the subject so far. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first attempt to assemble the tribal food and eating culture of the region done as done by me.

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