

Citation: Kanwal, A., Sultana, A., & Rahim, J. (2022). Analyzing the Benefits of Cultural Food Items for Women's Healing after Childbirth. *Global Anthropological Studies Review*, VI(1), 1-10.
[https://doi.org/10.31703/gasr.2023\(VI-1\).01](https://doi.org/10.31703/gasr.2023(VI-1).01)

DOI: 10.31703/gasr.2023(VI-1).01

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gasr.2023\(VI-1\).01](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gasr.2023(VI-1).01)



Analyzing the Benefits of Cultural Food Items for Women's Healing after Childbirth



Cite Us



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Abstract: *This article deals with the food preferences within the culture and the benefits of traditional food items for a woman after confinement. Within a culture, people have different food choices. Food selection is always defined by cultural, social, environmental, and personal choices. This study looks into the preferred foods within the culture, and how culture shapes the food patterns by emphasizing related traditions. This study tried to explore connections between food and healing by emphasizing traditional food given to new mothers during the period of confinement. The study looks into the benefits, especially those traditional foods that women eat postnatally. Traditional food is consumed by women to increase milk production, overcome anaemia and clean up the inside of the body after delivery.*

Keyword

Food preferences
Culture
Traditional food
Confinement

Introduction

Traditional foods refer to the food that gains prominence and wide acceptance in a particular culture. While addressing food choices according to culture, one of the beliefs was the healing process after postpartum. Traditional postpartum beliefs related to the healing of women are centered on the notion that after the birth of a child, a woman's body system is drained of all energy.

Women have different responses on giving birth. Some feel excited, uplifted, and energetic. Others are exhausted and want to sleep (National Institute for Health, 2020)

Women must have complete rest and also have to eat good nutritive foods to restore their health and energy. Different cultures have different beliefs related to food. Women receive certain types of food, and there is a belief that such food is good for health and also can boost

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the immunity of a child through lactating. Not only in villages but also in cities, women obey such types of cultural practices.

This study looks into the role of cultural food items in the lives of women who newly went through the process of postpartum. After childbirth, women get a special type of preference toward food and eat somewhat differently from their daily routine for their health and the good health of their newborn. Not only is this, but some other cultural foods also heal the wounds of women quickly and help women bear pain after childbirth. Women attain special care right after childbirth, and cultural food is one of the major concerns of all. Women eat special food to keep themselves warm while healing up, as well as to enhance breast milk for newborns.

Birth always creates a turning point in life and people feel happy, and on the other hand, birth is associated with worry and anxiety of losing a child and even a mother. Women during pregnancy and childbirth experience different customs that show the differences between nations and cultures in maternal and neonatal health (Miraj et al, [2023](#)).

While culture is the pattern of learned behaviors, it's a pattern that is created by man himself. Everyone seeks knowledge about culture from the beliefs and behaviors that exist in a society. People share all kinds of patterns, and those patterns include thoughts, emotions, communication styles, patterns in which they interact with each other, and rules and relationships among each other. Culture would perceive it as an inherited thing. In the same way that offspring inherit their ancestor's culture, culture is passed down from generation to generation. While living in an appropriate culture, everyone perceives how to learn patterns of behaviors and experience the world emotionally. How they behave in the world by living in an inherited culture. The sociocultural dimensions of it would allow us to understand

the health values, beliefs, and behaviors in an environment. While culture connects one aspect to another and allows people to live in it. Culture dictates people in all aspects of life. From living to eating, and from illness to curing disease in all aspects, Culture plays a vital role. One can easily find the role of culture in the living patterns of people (Dasilva et al , [2011](#)).

The choice of food practices can be influenced by one's identity in many societies, but has mostly been evaluated in light of the maintenance of cultural identity in migrant populations (Reddy, et al [2020](#)).

The role of food and community gardens in facilitating cross-cultural interactions, providing culturally appropriate food, and expressing cultural identity for new immigrant and refugee families (Lucas, [2022](#)).

While human groups continually encounter new things in people's minds, in some situations the individual members, of the new generation incessantly re-create the culture that they should learn. As well as having a classification of the universe of the potential foodstuffs into the eatable and the uneatable. Furthermore, inedible foods may be taboo and therefore clearly empowered with some implication, also be either not invented as food or simply unfamiliar. Culturally defined foodstuffs also may or may not be locally manufactured or collected, so cuisine overlaps with systems of local food production and possession and with systems of possession through different methods of exchange. As well as the raw foods are condemnation for the context of consumption which must also be considered for famous dishes. Foodstuffs can appropriately be combined in single dishes and single meals and in what sequences and by whom food dishes and meals are appropriately confused. Furthermore, every culture has its famous dish world, and they follow the food from generation to generation of their culture, this thing (Freeman, 2006). while within a culture people most often preferred traditional food depending

upon the availability of food. Some traditional foods are seasonally available but the shortage of food doesn't overcome the likeness of those foods. Inuit communities consumed traditional food in many ways, they ate some special types of fish, mammals, and birds that were used as food and prepared in many different ways either dried, cooked, raw, frozen, and aged. Moreover, among Inuit community research was conducted by the researcher in which they came to know 41 preferred foods of which 32 were traditional and 9 were market foods. Traditional food was liked by both adults and the young generation but adult-rated higher to traditional foods more than young people and their preference toward those foods was due to the belief that such foods are needed for good health and good survival. Further traditional food also contributes to the cash economy due to higher consumption of food (Wein et al, [1996](#))

Literature review

Food choices in culture

Food choices determine what should be eaten and why that food should be eaten, as well as why that food has a special place in the culture. Dietary intake always determines food preferences and food choices. People always consume that food, which is important from a social point of view and also from a health point of view. People consume food because it is important from a social and cultural perspective. According to the author, food is more than just a way to eat; food choices have a close connection to the entire society and influence culture. Both society and culture motivate people to select their eating patterns (Guiné, [2020](#)).

Dietary belief for women after confinement.

The dietary beliefs and food preferences for women right after childbirth are not only in Pakistan but in other Western countries, also prefer cultural food for women after childbirth. All cultures have their dietary patterns for a

woman who delivers a child. Like in China and other Asian countries, women are advised to rest for a month and during that period, keep doors and windows closed, eat hot foods, and avoid cold foods and drinks because it is accepted that cold foods are not good for women in this period. Women eat certain traditional foods and prefer chicken soup and other traditional foods every day for almost a week to forty days. Different cultures have different dietary beliefs and food preferences for the healing of women after delivery. And women who migrated to other countries also obeyed their own culture. The writer said that although women migrated to other countries, their cultural beliefs always remained with them. They prefer how their culture tells them (Humaira, et al, [2016](#)).

Women emphasize their dietary practices in the postpartum period. Punjeeri, a special type of food made with nuts and ghee by the household mother-in-law and mother, was used to improve breast milk and heal wounds. A special type of soup was used in China to replenish the blood of a woman who had given birth. Not only in Pakistan but in other countries also prefer special cultural foods (Humaira et al., [2016](#)).

Traditional food preparation after delivery

While traditional food preparation for women after the postpartum period in Kerala, India, the period of postpartum is considered the critical phase in the life of women. She needed special care and a diet to regain her proper body functions. The period following delivery is considered a period of mental and physiological stress. Women bear a lot of hardships before and during the postpartum period. That's why they needed special care and a nutritive diet that would heal them and boost their immunity.

After delivery, a woman faces nutritional deficiency and her body balance is disturbed. Women needed more caloric and nutritional intake. The period following delivery until the resumption of menstruation is critical because

women must regain strength and energy during this time, and their bodies require extra caloric intake. Women needed that diet to help them boost their immunity, cleanse their insides, get relief from post-partum pain, and enhance their breast milk for their newborns.

Although the diet for women varies across cultures and castes, different ethnic groups have different diet schedules for post-partum women. Women needed post-natal care and the aim behind that care was to prevent women from complications and to provide them with optimal care that would ensure the production of breast milk, regulate the normal menstrual cycle and provide support to women. Women who should not receive post-natal care at an early stage later face many complications. Following delivery, women are given easily digestible foods and aid in the cleaning of the uterus. After that, women are served a nourishing diet like meat soup. According to the author, in Indian culture, after delivery, the care of the mother and baby is placed in the hands of an elderly woman. The elderly women provide post-natal care and prepare traditional foods that have high nutritive value.

The basic goal of that diet is to help women recover from postpartum excretion and then provide nutrition for the baby through breast milk. The purpose of this article was to provide some traditional food items for women that have antioxidants, memory-boosting properties, anti-inflammatory properties and wound healing properties. One of the most well-known traditional foods for post-partum women in Kerala is "*Uluva paal kanji*" (rice prepared with fenugreek seeds). The purpose of adding fenugreek is that it contains galactagogue, which helps to promote digestion.

Fenugreek has properties like antidiabetic, antioxidant and galactagogue, as well as hypocholesterolemia, which help in purifying the blood, providing nutrition to cells, and removing waste materials. It also helps in the maintenance of breast milk production. Another

item that is used in the preparation of that food is "*Veluthulli*" jaggery. It helps in alleviating inflammation and pain and increases body strength. It's also beneficial for removing constipation and worms.

Garlic has properties like antibacterial, antioxidant, antiviral, and antifungal. Another ingredient is "*Sarkara*" (jaggery). It helps in the proper elimination of urine and faeces. It also helps in providing energy to the body and aids in relaxing nerves, curing pain, and giving sound sleep. It also provides energy for the post-natal mother and removes blood clots from the inside of her body. Another traditional food is known as "fried Moringa." In Kerala, it is given to women after 2-3 weeks of delivery. It helps in promoting lactation.

The ingredients, like Moringa leaves, contain phytosterols that increase prolactin levels. A high level of prolactin facilitates the production of breast milk and improves sleep duration for a baby due to breastfeeding. It is given to women 12 days after delivery. Traditional foods are consumed to strengthen the uterus and bring it into a pre-pregnancy state. They also help in the healing of wounds, improve immunity, and provide energy and nutrition. All those traditional foods are used for the good health of women and babies. We also provide women with a pure and traditional diet, which helps women heal up and remain safe from upcoming complications (Humaira et al, 2016).

Research Methodology

The methodology is necessary for conducting research. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature and the source for conducting research is primary data. The study was conducted in the village of Pind Begwal, Pakistan. The researcher gathered data with the help of participant observation, while Purposive sampling was used in which the researcher selected respondents intentionally to gain valid information.

Ethnography, observation, interviews, and discussion were the methods used to gain data. A

sample size of 35 respondents was interviewed in which researcher intentionally selected women to obtain data about the benefits of eating cultural food after childbirth. The researcher selected women who were married and had at least one child. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique while getting data from the respondents.

Discussion

Food Benefits after Delivery, for Women

Food to increase milk production

Punjeeri

One of the most popular food items for women after childbirth is *Punjeeri* (Punjeeri: is a traditional food made up of dry fruits and nuts for women after confinement. It contains many beneficial items for women). After the postpartum period, women had weakness and loss of strength which is why deficiency of essential elements would occur. For the fulfilment of all body nutrients women must eat something special that helps them boost their immunity because after the birth of a child, also in the process of lactation, women must need nutrient-rich diets. For healing her inside and for boosting immunity one of the cultural foods prepared by her mother or mother-in-law is Punjeeri. According to the respondents,

Orat jeyla bucha paida karni tay uski taqat alli cheez ni zrurt oni asa nay Garran wich Punjeeri di gashni orat ki. Us nay wich sariyan sukkiyan viyan cheeza banay aan baadam, khopra, meewa, pisty, char maghaz. Sooji, cheeni tay karra na keu vi banay aan. Us tu elawa sb tu zruri cheez kamar kas ta cheer is wich bai gashni. Is naal orat ki lakka nay darda na v aram aa gashna. Punjeeri garm oni jis ni wja naal buchy wasta dudh vi ziada oi gashna. (When a woman gave birth to a child, she needed a nutrient-rich diet. In our village, Punjeeri is preferred. We added all dry fruits and nuts like almond, coconut, pistachio then semolina, sugar and homemade ghee are also added. Besides all that, the other most important items are kamar kas and

cheer, which give relief from backbone pain. Punjeeri produces a lot of heat which also helps in producing milk for a baby inside the body of the mother).

Case study 01

While conducting interviews one of the respondents named XYZ age 37 said that I got married 5 years ago and that I gave birth to a baby girl after two years. She tells me that after childbirth I daily eat Punjeeri; she said that in Punjeeri her mother added something special known as chearh, which helps to relieve the pain of the backbone and waist. She said that after delivery she had a lot of pain which she had not overcome that's why her mother brought chearh and added Punjeeri for her. She said that after eating Punjeeri I felt relaxed and the pain was gone, not only this that food gave me strength and power and heal up my C-section. She said that beef was also used by me in my diet. My sister lived in my house for 10 days. She made beef for me without spices because spicy food is harmful to the mother and for the baby also because the baby is fed and through lactating nutrients of the mother are passed from mother to baby. If the mother eats spicy food, it can cause loose motion and stomach ache in the baby. She said that her curry was made with desi ghee. After that, she said that I used boiled water by adding fennel (*soont*).

Cumin seeds with milk (*dood zeera*)

After delivery of a child most women don't provide enough feed to the baby which is why they use some home ingredients and believe that it would prove beneficial for them. The cumin seeds are one of them. Respondent of the researcher said that,

Buchy ni pydaish seu bad meki lgna sa marra dhud buchy wasta thorra ay, o ar wayla rona sa fer meki marri saas oran akhya k tu dhud wali ta wich zeera bai ta pia kar. Tarry apny dhudha wich zafa oci. May ay akm shuru keta hun marra dhud kafi ona buchy wasta. (After the birth of a

child I feel I don't have enough milk to feed my baby because he was crying all day. Then my mother-in-law told me to use cumin seeds in milk. It will help in enhancing breast milk. I used that and now I have enough milk to feed my baby)

Soup (yakhni)

Soup is another special liquid food item for women after the birth of the child. That soup is made up of desi chicken is much more warm than other poultry chickens. So, for the soup desi chicken would be selected. That soup contains chicken meat in the water, salt, and black paper.

According to the respondents,

Desi murghy ki yahni ko bhori faida mand smjha jata hai. Delivery k baad kuch haftu k liay orat ko salaam wagara nai dia jata jo amm routine may bnaya jata hai. Desi murghy k gosht say yahni bnai jati hai, us me sirflasson or namak dala jata hai. Pher gosht k choty tukrri kar k usi k andr ubaal diay jaty hay. Pher usi k andr roti ko dal kar orat ko dia jata hai. Us me desi ghee bhi Shamil karty hay. (Soup with the meat of domesticated cock would be considered as most beneficial. After the delivery of a child, the mother avoided food that she ate on a daily routine and was served with special food. Soup with chicken meat was made by adding black pepper, garlic and salt. Then added a boiled piece of chicken to it. Then the female was served with that soup also added homemade ghee in it.)

The black paper also has a warming-up ability. So, for the woman, it is necessary to keep herself warm by eating warm foods and avoiding cold foods. After childbirth, women needed soft foods that would be easily digested because women had weakness also their bodies became much tired due to the postpartum period. So, she needed something special that gave him strength.

Nashasty ka halwa

Nashasta is one of the nutrient-rich diets for a mother after the postpartum period, and its preparation begins before the delivery. It is made

up of whole wheat grains ground into flour and then dried into a white powdery flour. It is filled with nutrients like starch and protein.

Case study 02

One another respondent xyz of age 40, having 6 children 4 boys and 2 girls, living with her husband says that (*Nashasta*) would be prepared for pregnant women. After the delivery of a child, the mother needs nutrients to gain strength and power again. Because delivery is a much more painful experience for women, and after that, most women have a deficiency of essential nutrients and experience pain in their backbone. Moreover, since the woman also feeds her baby, the mother also requires a proper and nutrient-rich diet. So, (*Nashasta*) is one of the nutrient-rich foods for a woman. Further, she says that (*Nashasta*) would be prepared by moistening the whole wheat grain in a water-filled closed container. After 10 to 15 days, when the grain becomes soft, it would be ground in a juicer, and then spread liquid material upon it (*Mahmal ki chaddar*). When all the water squeezed from that material becomes dry, an old woman at home mingles it in the palm of her hand. When all of the material has become powdery, store it in a container for almost a year and use it to make *halwa* for a woman who has given birth to a child.

Tripe (ojri)

A tripe of animals were also considered as milk-producing food. After the birth of a child women were advised by elderly women to eat tripe as much as possible because it has the ability to increase milk production. One of the respondents said,

Mara praytion oya buchi paida oi pr marry tankay khrab oi gy sy. Daktur meki peep sarrnay nay tekky laye jis ni wja tu mara dood koi ni reya marri buchi pookhi oni c fer marri sus meki ojri khalai bu zaida usni waja tu mara dood bnna shuru oya ta may buchi ki plani aa. (I gave birth to a baby girl by C-Section but after that pus

festered in my stitches, and the doctor gave me an injection for drying of pus, due to that milk production was affected and I couldn't provide enough feed to my baby and she became hungry. My mother-in-law suggests me to eat tripe. Due to eating tripe milk production enhanced and I became able to feed my baby).

Food that helps in cleaning up inside after postpartum.

Homemade ghee(keyyo)

Ghee (*keyyo*) is another preferred item for women after the postpartum period. It aids in the digestion of food and provides strength to women following the postpartum period.

One of the respondents said during interviews that. *marri saas mary wasta 2-kilo keyyo bnai ta rakhya sa. Desi keyyo* (Desi keyyo; ghee made up at homes by following traditional methods that were safe and trustworthy for villagers.) *khany ni wja tu orat nay andr ghair zruri maada sara bar nikli gashna tau andr ni sffai changgi tra naal oi gashni.us tu alawa keyyo takti ala v ona. Orat buchy paida krny tu bad bau laghar oi gashni ty keyyo usny andr hemt v paida karna.* (My mother-in-law made 2 kg of ghee for me. Homemade ghee is soft and hot. By eating this, it is able to purify the inside of the female after delivery, and it helps in cleaning the inside, so all waste material comes out. Further, it also overcomes weakness after delivery and provides strength to the woman.)

Carrom (jamain) as a cleaning agent.

Carrom was considered a cleaning agent and was associated with the cleaning of the inside of the body after postpartum. Mostly, fennel was boiled with water and then women drank that water.

According to the respondent, *Jamain Pani nay andr ubali ta rakhi shornay aa jela v orat ki tray lghni oi pani plainy aa. Isna mqsad ay k buchy paida krnay tu bd jo v faltu maada us ny andr ona o asani naal baar aa gashna. Zada tr tra hafy plany aa ay pani.* (Carrom was boiled with

water and given to a woman when she wanted to drink. The reason behind this was to clean up waste material from the body of a woman after the birth of a child. For the most part, for the three days that water was suggested).

Halva is a traditional first food for women after childbirth

Halva (Achwani)

(Achwani) (Achwani is a traditional liquid pudding containing wheat flour and semolina cooked in water. It is used as the first food for women after confinement.)

was another cuisine for a mother right after childbirth. It is made up of semolina, sugar, and water, while some people also add wheat flour to it. One of the respondents said,

Achwani narm ghzza oni orat wasta. Bucha paida krnay seu bad maau ki ay deti gashni. Is Nay vich gahaziat vi bau oni beshak ay itna mazzy na nai hona pr ay orat na andr saaf krnay vich bau changa sabot ona or maa na dood vi is naal bnna taa (Achwani is the soft food for a mother). After the delivery of the baby, the mother needs something soft and nutrient-rich, so *Achwani* is the best food for her. Although it is not delicious in taste, it is helpful for a mother in the cleaning up of the inside and also helpful for producing lactation for a baby.

Foods that overcome anaemia

Mutton

After delivery, women face the condition of anaemia because, in the process of pregnancy and postpartum, most women suffer from low haemoglobin conditions. It is believed that mutton can save you from that situation because it has iron in it.

Case study 03

Name XYZ, I'm 27 years old. I'm a B.A pass. I got married to my cousin, my mother's sister's son (*khala ka beta*). I live in a joint family with

my parents-in-law and my husband's brothers. I have two children. One son and one daughter. I was very weak before marriage. During pregnancy, I faced many problems, and after the delivery of my first baby girl, I became weak due to a deficiency of blood and did not have enough milk to feed my newborn baby. My doctor advised me on some foods and prescribed me a lot of medicines. My mother and mother-in-law advised me to include mutton in my diet. Because mutton has the ability to provide energy. It helps in producing blood and enhancing breastfeeding. But in the first 40 days, it was hard to digest mutton. That's why I used mutton soup in my diet, and after that, I took mutton in my diet. It helps me produce milk for my baby.

Mutton liver (Bakri kaleji)

The liver of a goat also has benefits and is used to overcome anemia. The respondent stated:

Pehlay buchay ni pydaish tu bad mary andr khoon ni kami oi gi marri ami meki kaleji na juice bnai ty denay onay say. Kachhi kaleji ki Langri (Langri: A traditional instrument looking like a bowl to grind any dry fruits, garlic, lesson and spices in the village. Langratha; it is made up of wood and used to mesh and grind the things in Langri.) vich bai tay langrathy naal kuttnay ony say, fer jela o bilkul pani ni tra oi gashni c ta fer meki plai shornay sy. May o bau mushkla naal peni c ya par us ni waja naal mara khoon jaldi pora oi geya (After her first delivery of the baby, she had a blood deficiency and then her mother made liver juice by grinding it with mortar and pestle and give it to her, although it was very difficult to take, due to that she recovered early.)

Cumin seeds with milk (Dood zeera)

Most women didn't provide enough feed for their babies. That's why they used some home ingredients that their adults dictated them as part of culture and it would prove beneficial for them.

The cumin seeds are one of them. The researcher's respondent stated that

Buchy ni pydaish seu bad meki lgna sa marra dood buchy thorra ya, o ar wayla rona sa fer meki marri saas oran akhya k tu dhud wali ta wich zeera bai ta pia kar. Tarry apny doody, which zafa oci. May ay km keta ta hun marra dood kafi ona buchy wasta. (After the birth of a child, I felt I didn't have enough milk to feed my baby because he was crying all day. Then my mother-in-law told me to use cumin seeds in milk. It will help in enhancing breast milk. I used that and now I

have enough milk to feed my baby.

Conclusion

The focus of the study was mainly on the preparation of special food for a woman after the birth of a child. Every culture has its own specific cuisine that is made for women after childbirth. Elderly women were responsible for making food for women after the birth of a child. The most preferred first food for a woman after the birth of a child was Achwani (liquid wheat pudding) and hot milk, which was given to a woman who gave birth to a child. After that, the most common and widely used food was Punjeeri. Punjeeri has all dry fruits and nuts consumed as hot food. Soup made with the meat of desi chicken was another preferred cuisine for women. Other foods with healing properties that aid in the production of breast milk for women were also used.

Motherhood exhaustion was commonly reported by both first-time and experienced mothers during the interviews, with top barriers to adopting a healthy postpartum lifestyle

There are many benefits to these foods. Women require special care because, during the delivery process, they lose their power and become weak, nutrient deficient, or suffer from anaemia. While feeding a baby, women require a good diet. For all these purposes, women are provided with some special foods that are different from their routine diet. Some foods are

permitted to be consumed by a woman who has just given birth, while others must be avoided for the sake of the woman's and the baby's health. Warm food is provided and the food is prepared with full attention. Punjeeri is one of the traditional foods, made up of dry and warm items. Some herbs are also added to heal up women. Apart from this, there are many other

foods like homemade ghee, chicken soup, mutton soup, halva that are given to women for the purpose of healing wounds, cleaning the body from inside, boosting immunity, producing milk and forming blood. After giving birth to a child, a woman included all of those foods in her diet, and they all provided benefits to her. is quite helpful for women when compared to medicines.

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