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Ethnic and traditional Iranian rice-based foods



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ABSTRACT

Background: Iranian national cuisine is very diverse and nutritious. A rice-based diet is commonly used by all people throughout the country. The current work aimed at documenting the ethnic and traditional rice-based foods prepared and consumed in Iran.

Methods: The data were collected by individually interviewing people from 15 cities in five districts of Iran (north, south, west, east, and central parts), as well as searching literature and scientific sources.

Results: A list of 100 ethnic and traditional rice-based foods of Iranian cuisine is presented in three categories: main meals, soups/pottages, and sweets/desserts.

Conclusion: The main ingredient of traditional and ethnic Iranian foods is rice. Iranian people develop many ways to create and consume rice-based foods.

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1. Introduction

Rice (*Oryza sativa* L.) is the second most important staple food crop in the world after wheat [1,2]. It is a main source of carbohydrate and provides proteins, fibers, vitamins, and minerals [3]. Generally, rice provides the bulk of daily calories for more than half the people throughout the world [1,4]. Rice production by the top 50 countries has been increased from 586 million metric tons (MMT) to about 738 MMT from 2003 to 2013 [5]. The largest producer of rice in the world is China with a production of about 205 MMT [5]. The other principal rice producers are Asian countries such as India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and the Philippines [5,6].

Iran is also a producer of rice in Asia with a production of 2.4 MMT [5]. The food consumption pattern of people in Iran shows that Iranians consume an average of 100 g of rice per day [7]. Rice is the second most popular and favorite food in Iran after bread. The most famous and common rice-based food products in Iran are *chelow kebab*, *chelow gheimeh*, *ghormeh sabzi*, and *joojeh kebab*. Each of these foods can be served as a main rice dish with side dishes. Rice can be also used in a vast range of Iranian rice-based food products such as soups, stews, sweets, and desserts [6].

Furthermore, it can be utilized as an ingredient of different kinds of ethnic and traditional foods in Iran.

Today, there is an increased interest in ethnic food throughout the world. By definition, ethnic food can be considered as a country's cuisine that is accepted by people outside of that country. For example, Iranian food is introduced as ethnic food outside of Iran [8]. The world is focusing more on traditional and ethnic food because many people from different countries tend to eat not only for survival, but also for pleasure [8,9].

Adding ethnic foods to the consumption pattern of people around the world is necessary for a pleasant workplace, healthy life, as well as having a favorite leisure time activity [9]. In recent years, many researchers have worked on traditional and ethnic foods [10–19]. They have put time and effort into scientific research and the introduction of ethnic foods to the global community [8].

For example, Kwon and Tamang [20] have defined religious foods and briefly introduced some of them. Kwon et al [21] have also considered old Korean documents for historical reviewing of some Korean traditional fermented foods. Shin and Jeong [22] have investigated Korean traditional fermented soybean products. They also analyzed the fermentation process used in the preparation of different types of sauces in Korea. The ayurvedic and traditional foods of Indian origin were introduced and classified by Sarkar et al [23]. The authors described the preparation method of these traditional foods. Some nonfermented ethnic foods of India were also introduced by Tamang and Thapa [24]. Ma [25] expressed the

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relationship between food, culture, and eating behavior in Chinese society.

Simatenda et al [26] have reviewed the preparation methods of traditional fermented foods in Swaziland. Khojimatov et al [27] have introduced some wild growing plants of Uzbekistan, which are used in the common local cuisine. Ray et al [28] have provided an explorative overview of traditional rice-based fermented beverages and foods in Indian cuisine.

Generally, Iranian ethnic foods are divided in two groups: wheat-based and rice-based foods. A wheat-based food in Iranian culture is a foodstuff that is served accompanying wheat bread, as well as foods made by wheat or wheat flour. Similarly, a rice-based food contains rice as the main ingredient. Iranian people usually eat a rice-based food once or twice a day, although their main rice meal is consumed at noon. In many Iranian families, a meal is not considered a food unless a rice-based dish is included, even if plenty of other foods are prepared for the meal. To the best of the author's knowledge, there is not enough research on the ethnic and traditional foods of Iran. Due to the great diversity of rice-based foods and its popularity, further studies on these types of foods are required. The objective of this study is to introduce and document some of the ethnic and traditional rice-based foods consumed in Iran.

2. Materials and methods

In the current study, the data were collected randomly from people from 15 cities in five districts of Iran: North (Rasht, Sari, Babol), South (Bandarabbas, Shiraz, Bushehr), West (Tabriz, Urmia, Ahvaz), East (Mashhad, Quchan, Nishabur), and the Central Iran (Tehran, Karaj, Esfahan).

The data gathering process was carried out by a face-to-face questionnaire-based survey. The required information was obtained by interviewing housewives and domestic people. Furthermore, some parts of information were provided from literature and scientific publications as well as by researching historical documents [24,27].

3. Results

3.1. Rice cultivars

Iran is situated in west Asia and borders the Persian Gulf, Caspian Sea, and the Gulf of Oman. It is subdivided into 31 provinces. Mazandaran, Guilan, Golestan, Khuzestan, and Fars provinces are the most important producers of rice in Iran. These provinces differ in terms of temperature, precipitation rate, relative humidity, and sunshine hours. Also, the soil properties in these regions are not the same. As a result, there are many diverse varieties of cultivated rice

in different provinces. The most widely-grown rice varieties in Iran are listed in Table 1.

3.2. Rice-based foods

Most Iranian people have three meals a day. Although the foods eaten for these meals vary in different regions, rice is commonly consumed by all people throughout the country. Table 2 introduces 100 types of traditional and ethnic rice-based foods produced and consumed in Iran. The table shows the Persian name, the English equivalent, the main ingredients of each food, and the medicinal uses and properties of the rice-based foods. The most common and popular of these foods are also shown in Fig. 1. The list of ethnic and traditional Iranian rice-based foods can be categorized into main meals, soups/pottages, and sweets/desserts. In addition, the rice-based main meal can be subdivided into six categories (cooked rice, mixed pilaf, rice and stew, rice and high protein dish, stuffed vegetables and kofta, and *tahchin*).

Therefore, rice as a main ingredient of Iranian cuisine can be consumed in one of the below groups.

3.2.1. Cooked rice

Cooked rice is one of the most popular traditional foods prepared and consumed in Iran (Fig. 1G). The rice cooking process is performed in different manners. Generally, there are three types of cooked rice, namely, *dami*, *kateh*, and *polow* (Numbers 27, 43, and 54 in Table 2).

Dami is the traditional dish of the Iranian people, which is prepared by boiling and cooking the rice in water. Before or during its preparation, salt and a little oil/butter are added. The water/rice volume ratio is about 2:1 and it changes depending on which variety of rice is used. Housewives obtain the proper ratio through trial and error. At the end of the process, the rice is cooked well and the water is completely absorbed. *Kateh* is the other type of cooked rice that is similar to *dami*. In this traditional food, using a greater water/rice volume ratio results in the production of cooked rice in a sticky and pasty form. Traditionally, the people of the Northern provinces of Iran use the glutinous varieties of rice for the preparation of *kateh*. *Polow* is also a very common Iranian food that is prepared in three steps. Firstly, the rice is soaked in salted water for 5–15 hours and then it is boiled for 20–50 minutes. Finally, the parboiled rice is drained and returned to the pan to be cooked. This technique leads to fluffy rice with nonsticky separated grains.

3.2.2. Mixed pilaf

Mixed pilaf is a type of cooked rice that is prepared by mixing a diverse range of ingredients. Meat, chicken, fruits, vegetables, cereals, and even nuts can be added in layers or mixed well with the soaked or parboiled rice and then cooked (Numbers 1–5, 7–8, 26,

Table 1
The most widely-grown varieties of rice in Iran.

No.	Province	Planted area (ha)	Cultivars
1	Mazandaran	238,000	Khazar, Tarom-Mahalli, Fajr, Sahel, Amol3, Bahar1
2	Guilan	238,000	Sadri, Hashemi, Ali-Kazemi, Hasani, Sepidrud, Kadus, Dorfak
3	Golestan	70,000	Domsiyah, Sange-Tarom, Neda, Nemat, Shafagh
4	Khuzestan	51,337	Champa, Anburi, Ahavaz1
5	Fars	49,360	Ghasrodashti, Anbarbu, Garde-Shahri, Champalenjani
6	Esfahan	15,170	Sazandegi, Sorkhe, Nokaran, Lanjan, Garde-Lanjan
7	Kohgiluyeh & Boyer-Ahmad	9,000	Champa-Mahalli, Charam1, Charam2, Charam3, Yasuj1, Yasuj2, Yasuj3
8	Lorestan	5,896	Mahalli, Tarom-Hashemi
9	Chaharmahal & Bakhtiari	4,138	Garde-Mahalli, Koohrang
10	Zanjan	3,817	Garde, Binam

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