

INDIA'S CULTURAL HERITAGE

India, a land of timeless traditions and kaleidoscopic diversity, stands as a beacon of cultural richness that spans millennia. From the snow-capped Himalayas in the north to the serene backwaters of Kerala in the south, every corner of the country tells a story - a story shaped by centuries of history, philosophy, art, and spirituality. The cultural heritage of India is not just a legacy of the past but a living, evolving testament to the values and creativity of its people.

The foundation of India's cultural identity lies in its deep spiritual and philosophical roots. Ancient texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana have not only shaped religious thought but have also influenced literature, performing arts, and social values. These works continue to resonate with generations, reflecting the wisdom, moral dilemmas, and timeless truths that remain relevant even in contemporary society.

India's cultural mosaic is enriched by its pluralism. With a population that follows a multitude of religions - including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism - the country is a living example of coexistence. Temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras, and monasteries dot the landscape, each representing architectural grandeur and spiritual significance. Festivals like Diwali, Eid, Christmas, Baisakhi, and Holi, celebrated with equal enthusiasm, embody this spirit of unity in diversity, bringing together people from all walks of life in joyous celebration.

One of the most enduring aspects of India's heritage is its vibrant art and craft traditions. Each region boasts unique styles of painting, sculpture, weaving, and pottery that are passed down through generations. From the delicate brushstrokes of Madhubani art in Bihar to the intricate zari embroidery of Lucknow, from the earthy terracotta of West Bengal to the exquisite Chola bronzes of Tamil Nadu - these crafts are not merely objects of beauty but expressions of community identity and historical continuity.

Performing arts have always held a central place in Indian culture. Classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, and Kathakali are deeply rooted in mythology and spiritual expression, combining rhythm, gesture, and storytelling into mesmerizing performances. Indian classical music, with its complex ragas and talas, touches the soul with its emotive power. Folk music and dance, too, remain a vital part of rural life, echoing the joys, sorrows, and aspirations of local communities. Whether it's the vibrant Bhangra of Punjab or the soulful Baul songs of Bengal, these traditions keep India's cultural heartbeat alive.

Language and literature have also been pivotal in preserving and nurturing India's heritage. With over 22 officially recognized languages and hundreds of dialects, the linguistic diversity is unparalleled. Each language has its own literary treasure, from the poetry of Kalidasa in Sanskrit to the devotional songs of Meera Bai in Rajasthani, from Tamil Sangam literature to the Urdu ghazals of Mirza Ghalib. Contemporary Indian writers continue to draw inspiration from this vast reservoir, weaving stories that connect the past to the present.

India's culinary heritage, too, is a reflection of its cultural richness. Every region offers its own distinct flavours, shaped by geography, history, and cultural influences. Food, in India, is not just nourishment but an expression of hospitality, tradition, and identity.

Bladder Cancer: Common to Uncommon Type

■ DR. RAJKUMAR SINGH

Bladder cancer is a common type of cancer that originates in the tissues of the urinary bladder, a hollow organ in the lower abdomen that stores urine. Most bladder cancers begin in the urothelium - the inner lining of the bladder. This lining comes into contact with urine and can be damaged by harmful substances excreted in it. Its overview include:

a. Types of bladder cancer: Urothelial carcinoma (Transitional cell carcinoma) - most common (~90% of cases), squamous cell carcinoma - linked to chronic irritation (e.g., infections, catheters), and adenocarcinoma - very rare; originates in mucus-secreting glands.

b. Causes and Risk Factors: Smoking - Major risk factor; smokers are 3x more likely to develop it. Exposure to chemicals - Especially in dye, rubber, leather, paint, and textile industries. Radiation therapy - Previous radiation to the pelvis. Chronic bladder irritation - Infections, long-term catheter use, bladder stones. Certain medications - Such as cyclophosphamide and arsenic in drinking water.

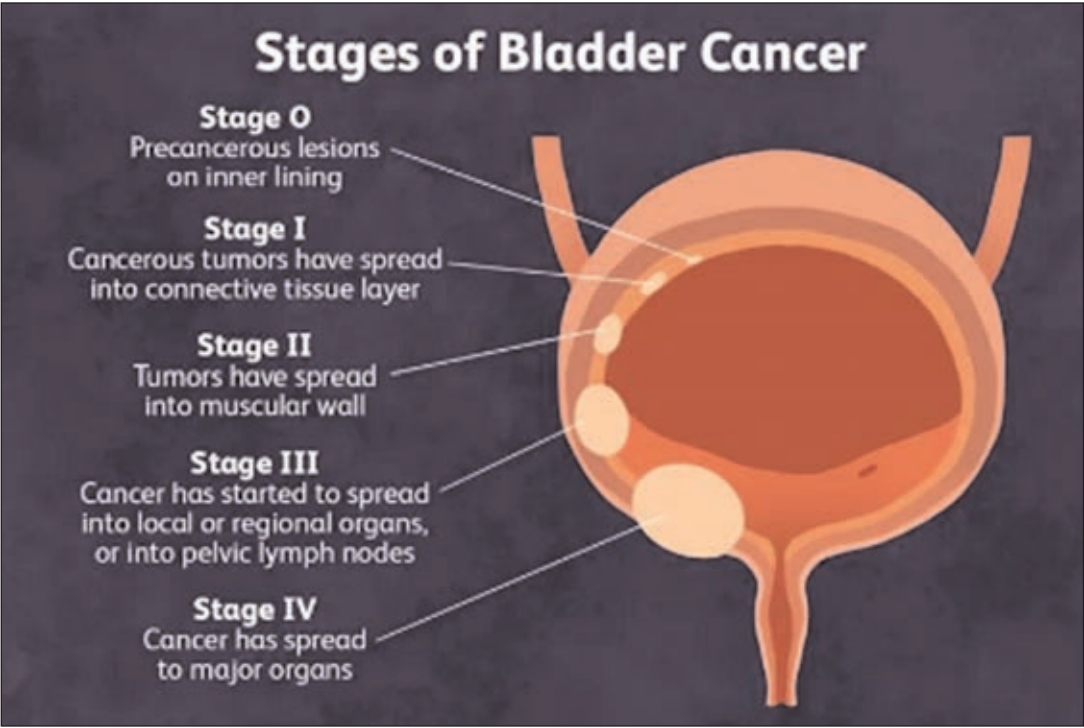
Age & Gender - More common in people over 55; men are more at risk. Family history or genetic mutations - Though not very common.

c. Symptoms of Bladder Cancer: Early symptoms: Hematuria - Blood in urine (most common symptom); may be visible or microscopic, frequent urination, urgency to urinate, and pain or burning while urinating. Advanced symptoms: Pelvic or back pain, weight loss, swelling in the legs, and bone pain (if cancer has spread).

d. Diagnosis: Urinalysis - To detect blood or cancer cells. Cystoscopy - Visual inspection of bladder with a scope. Biopsy - Tissue sample taken during cystoscopy. Imaging - CT scan, MRI, or ultrasound to see the extent of spread.

e. Stages of Bladder Cancer: Non-muscle-invasive - Limited to the inner layers; less aggressive. Muscle-invasive - Deeper into bladder muscle; more serious. Metastatic - Spread to distant organs.

f. Treatment Options: Surgery - TURBT (for early cases), or partial/total bladder removal. Intravesical therapy - Medications (like BCG) placed



directly into the bladder. Chemotherapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy (in select cases)

Diet and precautions

There is a helpful guide on diet and precautions for someone dealing with or recovering from bladder cancer - whether during treatment, post-treatment, or as part of prevention. In the context, there's no single "bladder cancer diet," but eating for immune support, healing, and inflammation control is key.

Recommended Foods Include:

a. High in Antioxidants : These help fight free radicals that damage cells. Berries (blueberries, strawberries), leafy greens (spinach, kale), broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts (cruciferous veggies), and tomatoes (rich in lycopene)

b. Rich in Fiber: Helps digestion and overall health. Whole grains (brown rice, oats, quinoa), beans and lentils, and fresh fruits and vegetables.

c. Lean Proteins: Supports tissue repair and immunity. Fish (especially fatty fish like salmon), skinless chicken, tofu, tempeh, and eggs.

d. Fluids: Stay hydrated to flush out toxins and reduce bladder irritation. Water (mainly), coconut water, and fresh fruit juices (diluted, low sugar).

e. Anti-inflammatory Foods: Turmeric (curcumin), ginger, olive oil, and green tea (mild and in moderation). Precautions for Bladder Cancer Patients: Avoid Smoking: Smoking is the top cause and recurrence factor for bladder cancer. Limit Chemical Exposure: Avoid dyes, pesticides, or industrial chemicals if possible. Use gloves and ventilation if you work with such substances. Routine Check-ups: Regular cystoscopy or scans as per doctor's schedule. Watch for Symptoms: Report any new urinary issues, pain, or visible blood in urine. Physical Activity: Light to moderate exercise improves immunity and energy. Walking, yoga, or tai chi are gentle yet effective. Support Immune Health: Manage stress, sleep well, and consider gentle supplements only if approved by your doctor (like Vitamin D or probiotics). Optional Natural Support (With Doctor's OK): Turmeric (curcumin) - Anti-inflammatory; may help with cancer prevention. Green tea extract - Antioxidants, though best in moderation. Mushroom extracts (Reishi, Shiitake) - Immune-boosting properties.

Advancements and future treatment

There are the latest advancements in bladder cancer treatment (as of 2024-2025), which are transforming how the disease is managed - especially in advanced or recurrent cases which include:

a. Immunotherapy: Immune Checkpoint Inhibitors (ICIs): Drugs like Atezolizumab, Nivolumab, Durvalumab, and Pembrolizumab are being used to help the immune system target cancer cells. Especially beneficial for advanced or metastatic bladder cancer. Often used after chemotherapy fails, or sometimes as first-line in patients who can't tolerate chemo.

BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) therapy: Still the gold standard for non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer (NMIBC). Research is underway to improve or replace BCG, especially where there's BCG resistance or shortage.

b. Targeted Therapy: These drugs attack specific genetic mutations in cancer cells.

FGFR Inhibitors: Erdafitinib b: For bladder cancers with FGFR2 or FGFR3 mutations. Oral medication used in metastatic bladder cancer.

Antibody-Drug Conjugates (ADC): Example: Enfortumab vedotin - targets Nectin-4 protein on cancer cells. Delivers chemo

directly to the tumor cell, sparing healthy cells.

c. Personalized Medicine & Genomic Testing: Tumor profiling helps identify specific mutations to guide targeted therapy. Precision medicine is leading to customized treatment plans. Example: Using molecular markers to predict BCG response or chemo resistance.

d. Bladder Preservation Therapies: Instead of removing the bladder (cystectomy), new combinations of: Radiation, chemo. Immunotherapy are being used in selected patients with muscle-invasive bladder cancer, aiming to preserve bladder function.

Future Directions in Bladder Cancer Treatment: Immunotherapy: Treatments such as Atezolizumab and Nivolumab are being used to stimulate the immune system to fight bladder cancer. These are particularly effective for advanced or metastatic cases where traditional therapies may have failed.

Targeted Therapy: Drugs like Erdafitinib and Enfortumab vedotin are designed to target specific genetic mutations found in bladder cancer cells. These therapies are especially useful for patients with known genetic mutations or for those who have already undergone chemotherapy.

Bladder-Sparing Therapy: For patients with muscle-invasive bladder cancer, a combination of radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and immunotherapy (known as trimodality therapy) is being explored. This approach aims to preserve the bladder while still effectively treating the cancer in carefully selected patients.

Personalized Medicine: Through genomic profiling and molecular diagnostics, treatment plans can now be customized based on the unique characteristics of each patient's tumor. This tailored approach improves the chances of success and minimizes unnecessary side effects.

Cancer Vaccines (in clinical trials): New developments in mRNA-based and peptide-based vaccines are being tested to help prevent bladder cancer from recurring. These vaccines are designed to enhance the body's immune response specifically against cancer cells.

(The writer is a youth motivator)

Natural Springs of Jammu

■ G L KHAJURIA

The Jammu and Kashmir State finds its gateway at Lakhanpur, boundary being Ravi river adjoining Punjab and Himachal Pradesh states. Jammu region right from Lakhanpur to border town Poonch in the East West and Ranbirsingpora to Banihal, Kashmir valley to the last reach of Ladhak abounds in historical, archaeological and spiritual significance and are with enchanting beauty and grandeur.

The Jammu legion as a whole encompasses the cynosure of vast sprawling and undulating terrain, ranging from Kandi belt of Lakhanpur to Poonch with scrubby and Pines forests. In its higher reaches are Shivalks and the Tawi valley in its back drop are enchanting and beautiful mountains ranges rising one behind the other with Lush green, Vibrant and salubrious scrubby and Chir pines. And then majestic deodar and blue pines. The Trikuta hills crowned by three towering peaks are of fantastic spiritual sanctity in whose lap is located world renowned sacred shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi. With the early golden sun rise over the Tawi valley, this offers a gorgeous glimpse of Mother Nature.

In the remote past, when the man mostly depended upon nature and its resources, population was dramatically low and as of now when the global population has off-shooted at sputnik speed the human demands have taken reciprocally an upward trend with the result that our natural resources followed depletion. And on industrial front, urbanization, over-exploitation of Mother Earth has in unison changed the very chemistry of environment and its ecosystem. Man's sustenance depended on fresh air, water, agricultural produce as there was no pollution (air, water, noise).

Nature had bestowed: the timely delivery of all systems and with the scenario climate, Monsoons, Summer, Winter, Snowfall are all time-bound. Our pristine springs which existed in our state changed their course due to disturbances which the man has made with the nature. Man was earlier dependent upon the natural sources of water from natural springs, nectar clear water of rivers, rivulets and other tributaries, but with the passage of time, these springs now stand depleted or with least water due more so that there is no percolation of water accruing from deforestation, floods of unprecedented nature. The water harvesting from rooftops, construction of ponds, underground tanks

to fulfill their day to day demands are nowhere in existence.

In Jammu and Kashmir, where the terrain and its tracks occupy their unique placement, such sources were abundant but have now lost their pristine grandeur and glory. However, still natural springs and water ponds do exist but so far as the quality, quantity and purity of water is concerned, these have been badly polluted expecting those which exist in the temperate, sub-alpine and alpine zones of Himalayan region.

► Springs at Kathua in the lower belt of the outskirts, where temples of Gods and Goddesses exist and people from faraway places come here for holy dip and annual festivals are as well celebrated.

► Springs of Nagri Parole:- There are many springs near this area falling in Kathua district. Just 3 to 4 kms down below Nagri parole is having natural spring adjoining an old pirsthan and people suffering from skin ailments are being cured after having a dip in this spring. It is believed that this is due to shrine Shakti of Pir Baba, But Scientifically the water has been seen to have sulphur smell.

► Springs at Airwan:- Airwan or Eravat, either way we name is located some 9-10 Kms from Nagri Parole and is the most prominent sacred place of Shakti.

According to Upendra Giri from U.P amongst other Sadhus, who look after these temples of Lord Shiva and other Gods and Goddesses averred that these temples are centuries old and are of equal prominence as that of Kidarnath and Badrinath. There are two big springs where pilgrims from faraway places including Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana come here for holy dip on 'Chaitra Chaudish' in March every year, pay obeisance to the sacred shrine of lord Shiva. A big festival is held here as elsewhere in Purmandal and Uttarbani in Jammu. The Airwan (a small hamlet) links National Highway -1A stretching over a short distance of 9-10 kms at Sakta Chak, near Ujh river.

In the outskirts of Jammu city, many springs existed which now stand depleted excepting at "Bhair Devasthan" around 15 kms from Jammu towards Udampur. It is a Shakti Shrine where natural spring exists alongside the Tawi and big fishes are in plenty and milk and kneaded balls of flour are offered. A miniscule number do exist at Jhajarkotli & Udampur (Devik) and while proceeding towards Billawar one finds many springs though now

depleted/under depletion. These are Podu, Danga Ki Baoli, Bani, Banas, Gharat, Jeetu, Thana, GamiIshri and lastly Panditain Wali Baoli and of all these "Khoon Spring" is most prominent.

► Khoon Spring:- Some 50 kms far from Udampur along Dhar road is existing this natural baoli with nectar-clear water and a main temple of lord Shiva also exists there, where people come to pay obeisance for blessings.

► Sukrata Springs:- Though in miniscule number are fastly depleting and thence proceeding uphill towards Machadi, which links Ranmagar through hillyt errain nestling amidst pines and deodar are having small natural springs with crystal-clear water of ample importance.

► Basohli-Bani Springs:-The entire track is having many natural springs linking Bhaderwah and the entire sub Himalayan region is as such plentiful of natural springs having crystal-clear water and the local populace subsist on their day to day requirement.

► Gauri Kund Baolies:- There is a cluster of springs at Chenani town itself as well as 'Guari Kund' which are centuries old. Mata Parvati, Lord Shiva's consort used to have holy bath where she meditated in the vicinity of Sudhmahadev forests.

► Sudmahadev's Spring:-This-spring is also named as "paprashi Baoli" and is of high sanctity as it is believed that aholy dip in this spring washes off one's sins. An annual mela lasting for couple of days is being celebrated in the first week of June where pilgrims from faraway places come here, pay obeisance to lord Shiva's centuries old temple. From Sudmahadev onwards to Man Talai, Bap, Sarar, Latti, Dhoona, Seri, Chari and finally one reaches Suezdhar (the origin of Tawi river). From the base of Suezdhar uphill one gets down to Bhaderwah amidst nestling pines, herbs, shrubs and other multitudinal medicinal plants.

► Kud Spring:- This spring is having its own importance, where nectar-clear water gushes out and is also called "Swani Wala Spring". The tourists from India and abroad are having a shortspelland a sweet taste of this natural spring of hilly resort where a temple of lord Shiva also exists where people from India and abroad throng for holy Darshan.

► Sanasar Spring:- Patnitop is a prominent hill resort on the tourist map of India and the World and Sanasar takes its route barely 18 kms from here. Over the remote past, Sanasar was a prominent lake, now

stands almost dried. Here exists natural spring also named as "Viran Spring" whose water is crystal clear and sweet and from centuries old a small temple of chancer "Nag Devta" exists where people from far flung areas throng here annually.

► Batote Spring:- Two prominent springs are in existence in this picturesque spot of Batote Viz. Amrit and Lal Spring having nectar-clear elixir of life leasing water and tourists from India and abroad are having short spells to enjoy the taste of sweet fresh water.

Now on entering the charming Chenab valley which is having a long stretch of around 185 kms from Batote to the last reach of motorable Padder. This prominence of Sub-Himalayan region with picturesque spots and lovely valleys, impregnable natural citadels of Assar, Bagar, Khaleni, Doda, Premnagar, Thathri, Kishtwar, Dul Hasti, Padder and Atholi. The entire terrain and their hill tops/uplands are snow-capped during winter nestling amongst broad leaved and pines and other herbs, shrubs, aromatical and medicinal plants. The valleys are the melting spots for scholars and savants. Embracing and delicious fruits still add to the beauty and splendour. The mounting cliffs of padder valley look like tongue-shaped spurs with deep ravines and tributaries which drain into gorgeous Chenab and it seems that here is the real life and all else is illusion. All along the road and their hill tops are dotted with ever-refreshing sweet water mini to mega springs with nectar-clear water and at places the springs are with multi-coloured water soothing the fatigued body and mind. These are of unaccountable in number and of the few prominent are in village Saroor whose water bath is 'having the legend to help the barren couples, apart from hot springs viz: Humar Nag, Pootnag, Tila Machi, Harel, Arhai, Mahalmag, Kundall, Amar, Murpunyar, Gadrash, Vadan, hot springs of Marwa-Dachan whose water cure orthopedic ailments such as gout and rheumatism. All These baolies are the treasure trove of mountainous region and are revered places for ablutions and worship in these areas of far flung villages and hamlets. And of all these natural springs, one by name Tattapani of Kishtwar is of utmost importance.

► Tattapani Spring (Kishtwar):- This is a hot spring also named as tattavani, located in the Paddar valley of Kishtwar. It has been seen that rice

placed in cloth when dipped gets boiled just like hot springs of H.P. (Manikarn Kulu). This spring is barely around 20 kms from Kishtwar in Nagseni range of Sub Himalayan region of Kishtwar.

► Tattapani Spring (Atholi-Kishtwar):- This spring is of immense prominence sanctity and has been referred to as "Sheshnag" in the old scripture.

► Marwa springs (Kishtwar):- These springs are having life-leasing nectar-clear water but are moderately hot and the water is medicure of multihued ailments of various diseases though quite unbelievable in present scenario.

And now on entering Bhaderwah from Pul-Doda, we find vale of Bhaderwah also nomenclatures as "Chhota Kashmir" constitute anellipse within the lush green, vibrant and slabrious greenery in the mountainous valley. Bhaderwah, infact, an airy Kingdom with blazing of glory dwelling well within the soul the "hesouled Bhaderwah". The enchanting valley with high mountains, towering cliffs, uplands, and green carpet like be-gemming meadows, lakes, rivers, rivulets and their tributaries and lastly the ever-refreshingly springs with nectar-clear life-leasing water and at places turquoise blue water fed by Shimmering snowy tops hold up their mirrors to the azure sky.

► Kallash Kund:- Around 15 Kms from Bhaderwah township is located a mega spring so to say a lake and it is abode of 'Yasuki Nag'. People from far flung areas within and outside from other state visit this sacred resort in huge number in their colourful attire on "Tridishi" after a fortnight of "Raksha Bandian", around the year and it is having crystal clear water of immensive significance.

► Gupt Ganga: It is an underground Ganga alongside Neeru rivulet where nectar clear water flows perennially and there are cluster of fishes of varied colours and the people feed these with kneaded balls of flour. A sacred temple of prehistoric time of Mahabharata exists alongside Neeru Nallah and within the temple there is a huge lingam of Lord Shiva. In and around the vicinity are few natural springs where nector clear water bubbles out.

► Parnala Spring:- This spring is having its own prominence with blue greenish water and lies within the Bhaderwah town along other Nallah and enjoy an equal prominence of purity and sanctity.

► Chhabra Spring: This spring is having plentiful of life-leasing crystal-clear

water of ample importance and it gives scenic beauty of the spot apart from to fulfill daily requirements of fresh water for the local populace of Bhaderwah town itself.

► Suraj Baoli: This is locally spoken as "Ashapati" and is an old sacred tirthstan situated towards south-east of Bhaderwah, some 8-10kms. Though its history is missing, yet its genesis is from 'Sanskrit' version as 'Suvarnavapi' viz. sun's pond. This lies under snowy cover in the lap of mountainous region and water gushes out from the sacred spring once in the year on 'Anavasya' when people from far-flung areas come over here with utmost reverence in 'Bhija vilage' where this sacred spring is situated. The delighted devotees come in the form of holy mace get holy dip to wash off their sins and then stay there for night and celebrate festival and mela on the other day with enchanting folk songs and dances with traditional blowing of flutes, beating of drums with melodious music which echo the softening sky. This is being celebrated in the 15thday of the dark half of Assu (a deshi month).

► Khakhal spring:- "Ban Nagrani" are the two other springs in the same vicinity of Bhaderwah and their nectar-clear water is of ample medicinal value and remedial for multitudinal ailments.

► Ghatha spring:- This spring is of prehistoric period, reported to be of Mahabharta time when Pandhavas spent most of the time in sojourn in these mountainous region.

► Udrana spring:- Located near "Vask Nag" temple just on the entrance of Bhaderwah town is famous for its spirituality and sanctity and is worshiped with due devotion and reverence by all those who come over here.

► Fort Spring:- This is located near historical fort of Bhaderwah, natural water gushes out which is of its own prominence and significance. The water of the spring is nectar-clear and of its own significance.

► Sona Bain- or golden spring with colourful water which remains perennially under snow and as per legend golden balls are reported be there under snow. Apart from these springs there are multitudinal other mini springs spread over the entire Bhaderwah enjoying their own Kingdom of prominence with blazing glory which dwell well within undug and unfounded vide, varied mysteries. There are plentiful of small spread rattling tributaries with turquoise where the deciduous belts meet the silent, serene, vibrant and slabrious Bhaderwah valley.

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