

An In-depth Analysis of the Roadside Nibbles and Sweetmeats of Kashmir

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Abstract:- The picturesque beauty of Kashmir is unparalleled, and so is its cuisine. While *waazwaan*, the elaborate Kashmiri banquet, which includes a plethora of exotic dishes, is famous all over the globe, not much is known about the quotidian nibbles and sweetmeats of this Himalayan region.

This research makes an endeavour to explore the everyday street foods devoured by the Kashmiris. The methodology used, is based on the author's personal experience (having been born and raised in the valley), referencing books, and gathering data from various blogs and websites, apart from administering Google Forms to a select set of Kashmiris.

Keywords:- Street Foods, Nibbles, Sweetmeats, Kashmir, Piecemeal Disappearance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kashmiris are known for their love for food, which is strongly influenced by the Mughals, the Afghans, and the British, who have ruled the valley from time to time in the last several centuries. Kashmir has a rich history and culture; though its cuisine heavily relies on non-vegetarian food, there is also an array of vegetarian fare available. It may not be out of place to mention that the research done on the delectable street food of the valley, however, is limited. Downtown Srinagar (locally referred to as *Shehr-e-Khaas*), is mostly located on the banks of River Jhelum, and the various street food joints lining its lanes and alleys, are happening hangouts for food lovers.

II. OBJECTIVE

- To shed light on the mouth-watering street foods of the Kashmir valley, in general, and downtown Srinagar, in particular
- To create an awareness about the indigenous roadside nibbles and sweetmeats of Kashmir
- Owing to its piecemeal disappearance, to popularise the street food of Kashmir among the local populace, especially the youngsters, and tourists

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The undermentioned account throws light on some of the umpteen roadside snacks consumed by people of the valley of Kashmir, especially its capital city, Srinagar:

Nader Monj'e

Sometimes also referred to as *monj'e guil*, this is the most sought-after evening snack relished by Kashmiris. These fritters, made from batonnets of lotus stems, are coated with a rice-flour batter and mildly flavoured with red chilli powder, cumin and carom seeds. Crunchy from the outside and juicy within, they are best enjoyed with Qahwah – the world-famous saffron-flavoured tisane of Kashmir; they are sometimes paired with a radish and curd chutney, too. Vendors selling this lip-smacking snack outside the Hazratbal shrine (believed to house a holy relic of Prophet Mohammad) and at various other Sufi shrines, is a common sight in Kashmir. Kashmiri Pandits attach a great religious importance to this delicacy - it is a custom to prepare *nader monj'e* during thread ceremonies, weddings, and other special occasions.

Pambachh

Rich in antioxidants, lotus seeds are locally referred to as *Pambachh*, which are grown in the numerous lakes (especially the Dal, Nageen and Manasbal) of Kashmir abundantly. Encased in a soft and spongy green bulb, they are soft and sweet to taste, and are eaten raw. They are mostly available in and around Boulevard Road abutting the Dal, and the Ashai Bagh locality of Srinagar.

Ken'e Baeb

The berries of the water lily plant are locally referred to as *ken'e baeb*. Each fruit contains thousands of minute edible seeds, which are quite crunchy, and are relished quite commonly by Kashmiris.

Gaad'e Monj'e

This speciality is a foodies' delight, made from gutted freshwater fish, coated with a batter of half-and-half rice flour and gram flour, and deep fat-fried. It is best enjoyed with a plethora of traditional dips, as accompaniments.

Mess'e or Gaer

Come winter and the markets in Kashmir are inundated with water chestnut kernels, locally known as *mess'e*, or *gaer gojj'e*, or just, *gaer*. These sweet and aromatic nuts grow abundantly in the Wular Lake, one of the largest freshwater lakes of Asia. The lake, located in the Bandipora district, is the main supplier of water chestnuts to the Kashmir valley. Water chestnuts can be had raw or roasted; they are also batter-fried with rice-flour and flavoured with special Kashmiri spices.

It would be pertinent to mention here that these nibbles, apart from other heavenly munchies (which are home-made since outside preparations are forbidden during days of fasting), are widely consumed by Kashmiri Pandits on Janmashtami.

Seek'e Tujj'e

Seek'e Tujj'e or just *Tujj'e*, are associated with the barbeques of Kashmir, and are made from nuggets of tender, boneless lamb. Marinated in indigenous spices, these succulent chunks are grilled over glowing coal and traditionally served with local soft bread, called *lavaas'e*. Complemented with an array of yoghurt-based chutneys, they are a consonance of textures and tastes. Rotisseries at the Khayyam Chowk of Srinagar are abuzz after sunset, when gourmands start making a beeline for these shops, selling their favourite evening bites. The Boulevard Road, with a scenic backdrop of the Dal Lake and the Zabarwan mountains, is another popular hangout for barbeque fans.

Halw'e Poraath'e

Ascribed to sacred offerings made at shrines, *Halw'e Poraath'e* consists of cardamom-laced, soft and golden semolina halwa, heavily garnished with dry fruits and nuts. It is paired with a deep-fried paratha – the gigantic paratha, with a diameter of about three feet, can be partaken by 6 to 8 people! This combination is shared among devotees as *tabarruq* (sacrament), and is believed to bestow blessings or grace upon people who receive it.

Masael

This chickpea preparation, a distant cousin of the Middle Eastern dish, *hummus*, is served on a bed of tangy radish chutney, and wrapped in a fresh *lavaas'e*, one of the popular flatbreads of the region. Conventionally, hawkers carry *masael* in specially-designed Kashmiri wicker baskets, and are often spotted under the shade of the bountiful foliage of the lofty chinar trees, which line the entire valley.

Kennk'e Masael

Somewhat similar to *masael*, this dish is made majorly from steamed wheat and black beans. Flavoured with local spices, it is generally eaten off a paper cone, and sells like hot cakes during wintry months. Another variant is made from black gram, and is referred to as *muang'e masael*.

Khand'e Gaazer

Very popular among children and those with a sweet tooth, this colourful confection is made from batons of refined wheat flour, fried in clarified butter and plunged in

sugar syrup. These crunchy candies are readily available in most downtown areas of Srinagar.

Basrakh

Introduced to Kashmir by rulers from Central Asia, *basrakh*, the crispy, sugar-coated hollow 'grenade' of refined wheat flour, cooked in ghee, treats one's sweet tooth like nothing else does. Though quite popular as a street food, it is relevant to mention that not very long ago, *basrakh*, along with a heavy sprinkle of dry fruits, used to be an important element of engagements, marriages and child-births in Kashmir.

Laay'e

This sweetmeat is made from puffed rice, with a coat of sugar. Since, just plain, white, puffed rice looks very run-of-the-mill, food colours are used, in order to enhance its eye appeal. Basketfuls of colourful *laay'e* are sold by vendors on wheel carts in the Hazratbal area, in particular.

Shangram / Lala Shangram

This deep-fried, sweet and goeey delicacy is deliciously tender and is made from wheat flour, semolina and sugar. Traditionally had with *noon chai*, the famous salted tea of Kashmir, it is a looked-forward-to evening snack for the locals.

Teel'e Karr'e

Lightly spiced and salted, this is an on-the-go munch, ideally had while on an evening stroll on the Jhelum Bund. This crunchy snack is made from fried peas and is a hit with school-going children, too.

Qulfi/Kulfi

The name of this dense, frozen dairy dessert comes from the Persian word, *qulfi*, meaning 'covered cup', and is likely to have originated during the Mughal rule. The pioneer *qulfi*-maker of Srinagar, Ama Buda - who was given the moniker of 'Qulfi King of Kashmir' - opened the first *qulfi* shop of Srinagar (sometime in 1930) in the Bohri Kadal locality. Hari Singh High Street is another place quite popular for traditional *qulfi*s.

Other Street Foods

The local markets are also aflush with roadside snacks like *chann'e chabeel* (crunchy, roasted Bengal gram), *mishre makai* (roasted corn), etc.

IV. CONCLUSION

The onslaught of western fast food has had a great impact on the indigenous street food of Kashmir, thus, jeopardising the livelihoods of hundreds of street food vendors of the valley. The tourism ministries at the central and state government levels should ensure that concrete steps are taken to revive the lost glory of these delicacies. Furthermore, food critics, bloggers, and vloggers, can also play an important role in popularising these dainties, before it gets too late and they disappear into oblivion.

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