

Food Culture in Medieval Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Kashmir is known for its unique food culture throughout the world. People had developed the distinct food culture of their own from a very remote period. However, with the occupation of the region by the foreigners, new cultures and customs were introduced along with them. The drastic change could be seen during the Sultanate period as this period witnessed the arrival of many new social groups from different parts of the world particularly from Central Asia and Persia. These new people introduced their own cuisines in the region which were welcomed and espoused by the local people. The Mughal occupation of the region also added the new cuisines, hence making the local food culture more rich and diverse. The present paper aims to study the development of food culture in Kashmir during the medieval period.

Key Words: Kashmir, Sultanate, Mughal, Afghan, Culture, Food, Drink, Meat, Tea.

INTRODUCTION

From earlier times, Kashmir was hooked to its Central Asian neighbourhood for regional, cultural and economic integration.¹ During the Sultanate period, Kashmir was not impermeable to the foreign influences. In fact, the impact of foreign culture was so profound and far-reaching, that even at the present age the Persian influence makes itself apparent in many spheres of life of the people of Kashmir like diet, dress, customs, etc.² The process of cultural assimilation took a definite shape during the Mughal period.

The period under study witnessed a significant development in this field as a number of varieties of cuisines were introduced into Kashmir from Persia and Central Asia. The contemporary literature gives a list of various dishes prepared and used by the aristocracy. All the people except a small class of ascetics ('*Rishis*') were very fond of choicest dishes. However, the dishes of the common masses suffered from the lack of taste and variety. They took frugal meals, simply to keep their body and soul together in view of their economic status.³

Diet

¹ Mushtaq A. Kaw, 'Central Asian Contribution to Kashmir's Tradition of Religio-Cultural Pluralism', *Central Asiatic Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (2010), pp. 237-255.

² Mohammad Ishaq Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir: Historical Dimensions*, Gulshan Publishers, Srinagar, 1983, pp. 166, 160-70.

³ Saqi Moti Lal, *Kullyat-i Shaikhul-Alam* (A collection of the sayings of Shaikh Nooruddin), Srinagar, 1979, p. 90.

The staple food of the people in the valley was rice.⁴ As there was no custom of taking hot meals, hence the boiled rice was left to cool down.⁵ During its preparation, neither salt nor ghee was added.⁶ Under Persian influence which started from the beginning of the 14th century, rice began to be cooked in different kinds of *pilavs*, like *zard-pilav*, *tursh-pilav*, and *shulla-pilav*.⁷

In times of famines due to scarcity of food, the poor people were cooking rice in a different way called *wugra*. In this method more water was used for cooking rice. It yields more food and satisfies the hunger of a man. Thus its use corresponds to the days of famine. Very little wheat was grown, because it was not much consumed in the valley.⁸ Barley was regarded as fit only for the poor, or for those who had renounced the world.

Both boiled and fried green vegetables were used commonly. The vegetables were dried up and preserved for the winter season, because in winter no crop was grown. This practice is in vogue even today.⁹ The favourite dish of the Kashmiris was to cook fowl and brinjals together.¹⁰ The various vegetables viz., carrots, bringil, turnips and pulses were cultivated throughout the Kashmir Valley.¹¹ The modern Kashmiri *Wazwan*, which is unique in the world for its special taste was introduced during this period.¹²

Walnut oil was mostly used by the poorer sections of the society.¹³ Rape, linseed, sesame and mustard oil was in common use.¹⁴ Lawrence had used the Kashmiri term '*tilgoglu*' for the mustard oil seeds.¹⁵ Butter and fats were not used commonly for the preparation of the dishes as it was considered to be harmful because of cold climate.¹⁶

⁴ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, tr. by H. S. Jarret, corrected and further annotated by Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949, Vol. II, p. 170; Mutamad Khan, *Iqbal-Nama Jahangiri*, Vol. III, p. 565.

⁵ Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, Eng. transl. Alexander Rogers and edited by Henry Beveridge, London, 1914, p. 300. Boiled rice was called "*Bhata*".

⁶ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 300; Mutamad Khan, *Iqbal-Nama Jahangiri*, Vol. III, p. 565.

⁷ Anonymous, *Tuhfat-ul Ahabab*, Eng. transl. Kashinath Pandit, New Delhi, 2009.

pp. 100, 130; Nagendra Kuar Sing, *Islamic Heritage of Kashmir*, Vol. II, Srinagar, 2000, p. 55.

⁸ Srivara, *Zaina Rajatragini*, (ed.), Ragunath Sing, Varanasi, 1977, (Eng. transl.), Kashi Nath Dhar, New Delhi, 1994, p. 274; Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, Ali Mohammad and Sons, Srinagar, 1959, p. 230.

⁹ Abul Fazl, *Ain*, Vol. II, p. 170.

¹⁰ Khwaja Mohammadd Azam Didamari, *Tarikh-i Azami*, (*Waqiat-i Kashmir*), (Urdu transl.), by Dr. Khwaja Hameed Yazdani, Srinagar, 1998, p. 311 & (Urdu transl.), Dr. Shamsud-din Ahmad, Srinagar, 2001, p. 477.

¹¹ Abul Fazl, *Akbar Nama*, ed. by Agha Ahmad Ali and Maulavi Abdur Rahim, Bibliotheca Indica, 3 vols., transl. by H. Beveridge, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1907, Vol. III, p. 831.

¹² Mulla Ali Raina, *Tazkirat-ul Arifin*, pp.150-51

¹³ Kambu, *Amal-i Salih*, Vol. II, p. 28; Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 301.

¹⁴ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 301; Nath Pandit, *Gulshan-i-Dastur*, (1753-54 A.D.), MSS, R&P Division, SPS Library, Srinagar, ff. 345-7, 372; Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Oxford University Press, London, 1895, p. 339.

¹⁵ Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 339.

¹⁶ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 301.

Froth of barley, buckwheat, and millet was mostly eaten by the common people residing on the outskirts of the Wular-lake.¹⁷ Water chestnut flour was the staple food article of thousands of people.¹⁸ The nut flour was supplied to *biryani faroshan* of Srinagar, by the farm contractors who appropriated the nuts from the lakeside during the harvest season.¹⁹ Bread prepared from the nut-flour was considered to be highly nutritive.²⁰

The other items of food used as meals by the Kashmiris were meat, fish, eggs etc. Fish, mutton, beef, fowls both domestic²¹ and wild were used by all sections of the people. Beans,²² *knolkhol*,²³ carrots and pumpkins²⁴ were the usual vegetables.²⁵ Grams were not locally produced but lentils and other kinds of pulses were grown throughout the Kashmir.²⁶

The people of upper classes enjoyed all sorts of delicious dishes of various types and various preparations of meat were also cherished on festive occasions.²⁷ The flesh of fowl, ram, goat, and various birds was commonly eaten. Horse's meat was also taken with relish. Pork was eaten by a large section of the Hindus in the pre-Islamic period, but it is not known if it was taken under the Sultanate period (1339-1586 A.D) as well. So far as the beef is concerned, it was introduced with the establishment of Muslim rule.²⁸ Still, until the time of Sultan Hasan Shah, there were many Muslims who abstained from beef. But gradually beef dishes became so popular that sometimes even Hindus took beef. There was a special market in Srinagar where beef was sold.²⁹ A class of people who totally avoided from meat eating was of the *Rishis* of Kashmir.³⁰ A broth-like dish of mutton, rice and spices called *Harisa* was sold in the [Srinagar] city during winter months. It was relished by all the sections of the society.³¹

¹⁷ *Gulshan-i Dastur*, f. 344; Hasan, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, Vol. I, f. 63a; Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, p. 134.

¹⁸ Hasan, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, Vol. I, f. 63a; Charles Ellison Bates, *Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh*, 1890, reprint, Vivek publishers, Delhi, 1974. p. 471.

¹⁹ *Gulshan-i Dastur*, f. 344; Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, p. 134.

²⁰ Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, pp. 354-5.

²¹ Abul Fazl, *Ain*, Vol. II, pp. 170, 175; Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, pp. 300-1; *Gulshan-i Dastur*, f. 437b; Suka, *Rajavalipataka (Rajatarangini)*, Eng. transl. from Sanskrit, Jogesh Chander Dutt, *Kings of Kashmira*, New Delhi, 1898, rep.1990, p. 421; Hasan, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, Vol. I, ff. 64a-b; Mohibbul Hasan, *Kashmir Under the Sultans*, Ali Mohammad and Sons, Srinagar, 1959, p. 230; Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, p. 254.

²² Abul Fazl, *Ain*, Vol. II, p. 170; Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, pp. 294, 300-1.

²³ Mohammad Murad Tang, *Tuhfat-ul Fuqara*, R&PD, Srinagar, Acc. No. 98, f. 112a; Baba Daud Mishkati, *Asrarul Abrar*, completed in 1063 A.H./1652-53, Acc. No. 5, R&PD, Srinagar, f. 213a.

²⁴ G. T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo...*, Vol. II, Sagar Publications, New Delhi, 1981, p. 230.

²⁵ *Gulshan-i Dastur* mentions that the pulses of *mong*, *moths*, black beans, white beans, *krothi*, and lentils were used commonly. *Gulshan-i Dastur*, f. 531a.

²⁶ Abul Fazl, *Ain*, Vol. II, p. 170; Vol. III, p. 727; Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 301.

²⁷ *Asrar-ul Abrar*, ff. 38b, 247a-b.

²⁸ Shaikh Farid-ud-Din Attar, *Tazkirat-ul Auliya*, (Urdu transl.), Moulana Zabaur Afzal Usmani, Delhi, 1990, pp. 241, 246.

²⁹ Srivara, *Zaina Rajatarangini*, Eng. transl. Kashi Nath Dar, K. C. Bansal Peoples publishing house, New Delhi, 1994, p. 285; Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, p. 135.

³⁰ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, Vol. 2, p. 150.

³¹ Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, p. 135.

Barley and wheat were cultivated in a few places of the valley. Buckwheat and millets were the main crops of Little Tibet (Baltistan) and Greater Tibet (Ladakh), Kishtawar and Pakhli.³² A special kind of rice called as *Janjan* was produced in Rajouri, but the people mostly used bread in these regions.³³ Bakers prepared various types of bread of wheat flour called as *jasa* and *nan*. Ghee was also used while baking.³⁴ The inhabitants mostly eat boiled milt, oil and greens.³⁵

Saffron and various kinds of spices like pepper, chilies, ginger, turmeric, cloves, etc. formed important ingredients in the Kashmiri cooking, which were added to increase the taste and flavor of the dishes.³⁶ In addition to the locally cultivated spices, some of the spices were mainly imported from Agra to Kashmir.³⁷

Fruits were grown in such abundance that they were rarely bought or sold. The owner of a garden and the man who had no garden were all alike, for the gardens had no walls, and no one was prevented from picking the fruits. Pears, cherries, plums, apricots, grapes, apples, and peaches were the principal fruits that were eaten. Mulberry was cultivated for its silk and so its fruit was not taken. Some fruits like jujube, which had medicinal qualities, were likewise preserved.³⁸

Drinks

Most common drink, though not intoxicating was tea taken by most of the people. Tea was called as *Ja (Cia)*³⁹ in Ladakh and *Cha* in Iran.⁴⁰ It was imported mainly from China via Ladakh.⁴¹ The tea was also imported from Yarkand to Kashmir.⁴² Well-to-do people drank tea with milk and butter.⁴³ We know from Desideri that China tea was the main drink in

³² Ibid.

³³ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 294; Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire* A.D 1656-68, transl. by Archibald Constable, 2nd edition revised by Vincent A Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1916, pp. 417-18; J.P. Ferguson, *An Introduction to the History of Kashmir*, p. 62. This best quality of rice of Rajauri was exported to the imperial kitchen of the Mughals. Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, pp. 135, 221.

³⁴ *Gulshan-i Dastur*, ff. 427a, 433b.

³⁵ *Russian Travellers to India and Persia (1624-1798)*, Kotov, Yefremov, Danibegov, transl. and edited by P. M. Kemp, Jiwan Prakashan, Delhi, 1959, p. 119.

³⁶ Abul Fazl, *Ain*, Vol. II, p. 172; Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, pp. 300-1; Francisco Pelsaert, *Remonstrantie*, (C.1626), Eng. transl., Moreland and P. Geyl, "*Jahangir's India*", W. Heffer & Sons LTD, London, 1925, pp. 34-35; *Gulshan-i Dastur*, ff. 417b, 418a and 420b; Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, pp. 46, 73.

³⁷ Pelsaert, *Jahangir's India*, pp. 34-35.

³⁸ Abul Fazl, *Ain*, p. 353. See also Abdul Majid Mattoo, *Kashmir under the Mughals*, pp. 134, 221.

³⁹ Ippolito Desideri, *Mission to Tibet...*, p. 162.

⁴⁰ Qazi bin Kashifuddin Muhammad Yazdi, *Risala-I Chub-I Chini*, Add. 19, 169, ff. 155b-156a; Cf. Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, New Delhi: Oxford University press, 1963, third edition, 2014, p. 51n.

⁴¹ Hasan, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, Vol. I, f. 64b.

⁴² Mushtaq Ahmad Kaw, *The Agrarian System of Kashmir*, pp. 104-05.

⁴³ *Russian Travellers to India and Persia (1624-1798)*, Kotov, Yefremov, Danibegov, transl. and edited by P. M. Kemp, Jiwan Prakashan, Delhi, 1959, p. 119.

Ladakh during the early eighteenth century.⁴⁴ By the late eighteenth century, the custom of drinking tea had been widely established by the rich class in Kashmir.⁴⁵

On festive occasions, there was free consumption of liquor by the participants.⁴⁶ Drinking of wine was popular although it was frowned upon by the orthodox. As the Hindu religion specially recommended the use of wine on ceremonial occasions.⁴⁷ *Anguri* and *qandi* were the cherished drinks of singers.⁴⁸ It was not an uncommon sight to see laymen and Brahman priests alike in a state of drunkenness during Hindu festivals.⁴⁹

The Muslims, who participated in these festivals, also freely partook of wine. Most of the Sultans and their nobles too drank wine.⁵⁰ Sultan Zainul Abidin (1420-70 A.D) took it in moderation, but Sultan Haidar Shah (1470-80 A.D) was a confirmed drunkard, and as a result neglected his state duties. Hasan Shah (1486-95 A.D) was in the habit of arranging drinking parties in his palace, or in the boats on the Jehlum, and used to get drunk on these occasions.⁵¹ There appeared substantial decrease in liquor consumption during the latter half of the 17th century.

Soft liquor of various types was used by all and sundry.⁵² It was distilled from grapes, barley, rice and mulberries.⁵³ Locally the liquor was called *mas*.⁵⁴ *Boza* was prepared from rice in Pakhli as well as in the valley.⁵⁵ The distilled liquid was preserved in earthen jars for years together. The oldest '*boza*' was called '*achi*'⁵⁶ in Little (Baltistan) and Greater Tibet (Ladakh), a peculiar drink was prepared from barley, millet and buckwheat.⁵⁷ It was mixed with goat's butter. The delicious soft intoxicating drink was called '*chang*'. Cups after cups were taken to heat up their bodies.⁵⁸

Besides alcohol, the use of other intoxicants like bhang and opium was also common. Tobacco was introduced during the late 17th century,⁵⁹ and during 18th century, it was puffed

⁴⁴ Ippolito Desideri, *Mission to Tibet*, p. 162.

⁴⁵ *Russian Travellers to India and Persia (1624-1798)*, tr. P. M. Kemp, Delhi: Jiwan Prakashan, 1959, p. 119.

⁴⁶ *Gulshan-i Dastur*, ff. 404, 560.

⁴⁷ Sunil Chandra Ray, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir*, Calcutta, 1957, p. 66.

⁴⁸ *Gulshan-i Dastur*, ff. 404a, 415a-b.

⁴⁹ *Zaina Rajatragini*, pp. 124, 126.

⁵⁰ Jonaraja, *Rajatarangni*, Eng. transl. J. C. Dutt, *Kings of Kashmira*, 1898, (edit.) by Srikanath Kaul, Hoshiarpur, 1967, p. 80.

⁵¹ *Zaina Rajatragini*, pp. 232, 245.

⁵² Abul Fazl, *Ain*, Vol. II, p. 170; Kumbu, *Amal-i Salih*, Vol. II, p. 34; *Gulshan-i Dastur*, f. 415a-b.

⁵³ Mutamad Khan, *Iqbal-Nama Jahangiri*, Vol. III, p. 565; Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 300.

⁵⁴ Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p. 300.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290; Muhammad Azam Didamari, *Waqiat-i Kashmir*, p. 174.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁵⁷ William Moorcroft, & George Trebeck, *Travels in the Himalayan Province of Hindustan and the Punjab, in Ladakh and Kashmir; in Peshawar, Kabul, Kunduz and Bokhara*, Asiatic Society of Bengal, London, 1841, Vol. I, pp. 232-3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England through the Northern part of India, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Persia and into Russia by the Caspian Sea*, 2 Vols., R Faulder and Son, London, 1808, Vol. II, p. 7; Hasan, *Tarikh-i Kashmir*, Vol. I, f. 64a.

by a larger section of the society.⁶⁰ In addition, butter-milk and various kinds of sherbets were taken. The use of betel-leaves, so common under the Rajas, does not find any mention in the chronicles of the Muslim period.

Conclusion

The food culture of the period under study was the direct outcome of the geographical and climatic factors, social intercourse, foreign impact, religious considerations and economic conditions of the various classes. Not only were the local dishes exposed to the outer world, this period also witnessed the cultural accommodation by the local population which in turn resulted into the enrichment of its traditional food culture with the new cuisines.

⁶⁰ Gulshan-i Dastur, ff. 436b, 440b; Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, p. 96.