

## Food of sultanate period of India

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### Abstract

With the Arab invasion of Sindh in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, the primarily Hindu culture of pre-modern India began to acquire a new dimension. Successive Muslim conquests over the 11<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries brought Afghan, Persian and Central Asian influences into north Indian cuisine and these foreign traditions were seamlessly assimilated by the local population, adding to the already rich diversity. The growing tradition of feasting and luxury reached its apogee under the Mughals.

**Keywords:** Hindu culture, Arab invasion, Mughals

### Introduction

Islam, a monotheistic religious system founded in seventh century, and based on the teachings of Prophet Mohammad, as laid down in the holy book of the Quran, Islam is a complete way of life. As such, diet plays a very important role in the daily life of a believer. There are many verses in the Quran, which draw attention to the nature of life and invite believers to carefully study their bodies, their souls and their mutual relationship. As the human body is the greatest gift of God, humans are advised to take care of it. For this reason alone, Islam has prohibited certain foods due to their ill effects and permitted all other pure, clean foods. Islamic dietary guidelines suggest a balanced diet for the growth, strength and repairing of the body.

The Arabic word *halal* means proper and lawful, referring to the food that is permitted under the guidelines found in the Quran. Islamic dietary law has selected quadrupeds like cattle, sheep, goats, camels and horses for consumption, along with chickens, ducks, game birds, etc. Both fresh and salt-water fish, with scales, are also acceptable. These are *halal*, but they must also be *zabihah*, that is, slaughtered according to Islamic rituals, in order to be suitable for consumption. Slaughtering an animal according to these guidelines limits the pain it must endure.

Fresh or naturally frozen vegetables, fried or dried fruits, legumes like peanuts, cashew nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts etc., are all *halal*, along with grains, such as wheat, rice, rye, barley, oats, etc. Milk, honey and any non-intoxicating plants are also allowed.

*Haram* refers to food that is unlawful under Islam. Some examples of *haram* include carnivorous animals, pigs (and their by-products), birds of prey, reptiles and insects. In addition, the blood of *halal* animals and its by-products is also *haram*. Like *halal*, *haram* extends to the method by which the animal has died, so those that have died, instead of being ritually slaughtered, are *haram*. Otherwise, *halal* animals killed in the name of anyone other than Allah, or without the Islamic rites are also considered *haram*. Alcohol and other intoxicants are definitely *haram*.

The rulers of India's princely states had lavish lifestyles and patronised art and culture. However, the Hindu view of food was an important part of man's relationship with Gods, and not for pleasure alone. The Muslims brought a refined, courtly etiquette to the rather austere Hindu dining ambience and during this period, the Maharajas of northern India began to imbibe aspects of Islamic culture and practices.

A distinct court cuisine evolved over a period of time. The rich used fine wheat and choice meats, and other used cheaper grains and foods, limiting indulgence in sweets and richer food to festival times. There was of course an extravagant display of wealth at the royal feasts that were held to strengthen bonds and forge alliances among rulers.

Regional climate, availability of food, religious recognition, tradition and custom, individual preferences, and exposure to the outside world are the factors, which affect the food of any society. With the advent of Islam in India, people of this land came into the contact of rich culture of Middle East and central Asia.

India was producing in abundance, fruits, vegetable and the different crops during the period of medieval India. Wheat, rice, peas, gram, black gram, green gram, cowpeas, pigeon peas, soybean, oilseeds, barley, sorghum, water chestnut, fenugreek, sugarcane, mustard, linseed etc. were produced in sufficient quantity at that time.

In the pre Mughal India, people used to eat seasonal fruits of all varieties. These were mentioned in contemporary sources sometimes. Ibn Batuta mentioned apple, green berry, orange, black berry, water chestnut, pomegranate, sugarcane, madhuca Indica (*mahua*), cucumber, watermelon, muskmelon etc <sup>[1]</sup>.

Amir Khusru in his Nuh siphir praises guava and grapes of India, which cannot be found elsewhere, and mangoes and bananas were grown in abundance <sup>[2]</sup>.

According to Shihabuddin Al Umri, fig, grapes, sour and sweet pomegranates, banana, peach, lime, mulberry, watermelon, muskmelon, cucumber, pear, apple, mango and cocunut were eaten by the people at large. Muslim used dates for opening their fast (*roza*) <sup>[3]</sup>.

Clarified butter and butter were used in Pre Mughal India <sup>[4]</sup>.

Ibn batuta observed once, a Habsi drinking clarified butter after having food <sup>[5]</sup>.

Different kinds of vegetables were grown in abundance in Pre Mughal period India. Raddish, turnip, carrot, bottle guard, pumpkin, eggplant, soy, carissa curandas (*karaunda*), beetroot, onion, garlic and mint leaves etc. were grown in abundance <sup>[6]</sup>.

Rizkullah Mustaqi described very delicious vegetable prepared by *neem* leaves but having no bitter taste <sup>[7]</sup>.

India is known to the world as a land of spices. Various kinds of spices were produced. Shihabuddin al Umri mentioned cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, cardamom and cubeb (*kababchini*) were produced in large quantity <sup>[8]</sup>. Spices were used both in the vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes.

During the Sultante period, references have been found with regard to bread (*roti*) of wheat, sometimes fine flour breads were prepared, and bake or fried breads (*poori*) were also used. Ibn batuta mentioned several types of *rotis* and *pooris* such as *chapatis* that were very thin, *rotis* that was fried in ghee, called *Musk* in his country. *Sabuni Halwa* (a kind of sweet dish), was filled in between these *rotis*. Sweet *roti*, called *khiski* was prepared with sugar and ghee filled with almond, pistachio, onion and different spices <sup>[9]</sup>. *Rotis* occupies important place in Indian food since ages.

Suagr Candy (*mishri*) was used while making *sherbat* (sweet beverage) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Everyone enjoyed *sherbat*. Sometimes in public function *sherbat* was offered by the sultan to everyone and it was kept in leather cistern or in some big utensil and rose water was mixed in it <sup>[11]</sup>. This practice is easily seen even today in India. In the Sultanate period, Sultan's food consisted different types of *roti* and rice generally. Multiple kinds of pickles were used. Vegetable prepared in ghee, several dishes prepared in milk, *lassi* etc. were used <sup>[12]</sup>. According to Shihabuddin, cooked rice and roasted grains were sold in the market <sup>[13]</sup>.

Meat of goat, lamb, cow, various kinds of birds like sparrow, pigeon, chicken etc. were relished. *Arz-e-Mamalik* of Balban used to give his employee meat of pigeon, chicken and lamb of best quality daily <sup>[14]</sup>.

Ibn Batuta described his meeting with Noble Qutubuddin in which various types of vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods were served to him. He was offered meat of lamb in Multan. Meat of lamb was cooked in different ways like big pieces of lamb was roasted; another ways of making was to prepare in ginger, onion and different spices.

Minced meat (*keema*) was filled in fine flour cake termed as *samosa*. Roasted chicken was also relished with pleasure. According to Ibn Batuta roasted chicken and roasted meat were relished in Multan in special occasion by the people. Fishes were also eaten by the people <sup>[15]</sup>. In south, meat of birds and fishes were eaten with rice <sup>[16]</sup>.

Sweet dishes (*mithai*) occupy a place of importance in Indian food since time immemorial. Various kinds of sweet dishes were referred in contemporary sources as well as in foreigner's travelogue. Ibn batuta described several types of *halwas*, such as *sabuniya*, *khisti*, *kaji*, *kahariya* and *hasimi*. *Sabuniya* was sweet *pooris* fried in ghee. *Khisti* was prepared with the help of wheat, sugar and ghee <sup>[17]</sup>. Barani mentioned dishes like *haluwa e sabuni* and *revari* <sup>[18]</sup>.

Amir Khusru in his *Kiran us sadain* described feast given by

Kaikubad in the honour of his father consisted different types of sweet dishes like *haluwas* <sup>[19]</sup>.

References have also been found of different types of *laddo*, *barfis* made by saffron, sandal, musk, almond and different dry fruits.

According to Shihabuddin Al Umri, sixty-five types of sweet dishes were sold in the market <sup>[20]</sup>.

Dry fruits consumption habit was also prevalent in this age. Although not grown in India yet different dry fruits like almond, pistachio, walnut, raisins etc imported from abroad. Almond, pistachio and walnut were filled in *samosas* <sup>[21]</sup>.

Kings and Nobles used to relish delicious and healthy foods according to their own taste and preferences. Head of kitchen was called *chasngir* responsible for arranging the cereals, spices, vegetable, fruits, every kind of meats and other eatables. Kings and nobles eat together on *dastarkhan* comfortably. Their food consisted rice, *biryani*, *nan*, *nan e tandori* (bread prepared in oven), *samosas*, *kababs*, chicks, *haluwa* and fish etc <sup>[22]</sup>.

Ibn batuta described the reception hosted in the honour of Qazi of Tirmiz Qiyamuddin by Muhammad Bin Tughlaq. Twenty cooks were reached Multan before the arrival of *qazi*. Very thin *rotis* were served first, six pieces of roasted lamb were put before everyone thereafter, and then *pooris* were served. Such type of *rotis* called *mushrak* in Ibn Batuta country, filled with *haluwa*.

*Khiski* (sweet bread) was put on every *roti*. Meat Cooked in ginger, onion, and ghee was served next. Four or five *samosas* filled with minced meat (*keema*) were served after that to everyone. Rice cooked in ghee was served on which roasted meat was laid <sup>[23]</sup>.

According to Ibn Batuta, people used to drink *sherbat* made up of sugar and rose water before eating food and *fukka* (a kind of beer) was drunk after the food. At last, *pan* (betel) with *supari* (areca nut) was enjoyed <sup>[24]</sup>.

*Lassi* (a beverage using milk curd and sugar) was prevalent in south. Ibn Batuta saw once Jamuluddin Muhammad drinking *lassi* after the food <sup>[25]</sup>. Shihabuddin Al Umri mentioned fruit juices were also sold in the market <sup>[26]</sup>.

Two types of foods were prepared in the palace of King according to Ibn Batuta. Sultan himself savoured special dishes alongwith nobles, foreigners and his invited guests and relatives. Sometimes Sultan placed a piece of bread on a plate and gave to a suitable person as a mark of respect <sup>[27]</sup>.

Common people used to eat *rotis*, sweet *samosas*, roasted meat, rice and chicken. Foods were eaten twice a day <sup>[28]</sup>.

According to Amir Khusro aristocracy relished *sherbat e lavgir*, *samosa*, *nan- e-tandori*, *haluwas*, *sabuni wine* and *pan* and various kinds of birds meat <sup>[29]</sup>.

According to Ibn Batuta in the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq two thousand people including Khan, Malik, Amir, Sipahsalar and important military officials used to eat foods every day in the king's palace. In the royal kitchen, two thousand five hundred cows, one thousand goats, horses and different kinds of birds were cooked everyday <sup>[30]</sup>.

Sufis and Saints used to eat very simple food. Generally, they eat *khichdi* with a little amount of *ghee*. According to Ibn batuta, Shiekh Nizamuddin Auliya used to offer their disciple *roti* with bean vegetable. *Langar* (a communal kitchen) was offered to everyone who visited his khanqah twice a day in

which very simple food was offered <sup>[31]</sup>.

Besides, Sufis diets included *makiya* (cooked bird), *viranj pokhta* (Cooked Rice), *sheer viranj* (Kheer), *yugast* (Curd), *nan (roti)*, *phirmi sheer* (Kheer cooked in milk, sugar and rice), *haluwa*, *shorva* (Meat and spices) and dry fruits <sup>[32]</sup>.

Foods of common and poor people are very simple. They used to eat coarse grain and roasted gram among other things.

Betel or *Pan* chewing and offering was prevalent in Pre Mughal India as well. *Arz-e-Mumalik* of Balban was famous for betel chewing. The number of times, he used to chew betel, offers others in his office as well <sup>[33]</sup>. It was common practice of the time to offer betel after the feast to everyone <sup>[34]</sup>.

Amir Khusro praised betel in *Nuh Siphir*. According to him, no other things in this world were comparable to betel <sup>[35]</sup>. Ibn Batuta described one spoon of spices was used in betel offered to everyone after the feast <sup>36</sup>. Shihabuddin Al Umri said that people used to get satisfied after betel chewing <sup>[37]</sup>. Allauddin Khilji decided the rates of betel and areca nut as well while implementing his market reforms <sup>[38]</sup>. It was common practice to offer betel in royal court several times in a day.

Alcoholic beverages was considered *haram* (forbidden) in Islam due to its harmful effect but it was customary for people to drink alcohol except God fearing and religious minded people among Muslims. Drinking Parties was organised by the Hindus and Muslims kings and nobles alike. Sultan Ruknuddin Firoz was heavy drinker <sup>[39]</sup>. Balban used to drink when he was in nobility but became abstemious after becoming the Sultan and forbade his son Bughra Khan to drink alcohol <sup>[40]</sup>.

*Kotwal* of Delhi Ala-ul-Mulk used to drink with Alauddin Khilji. Later, Alauddin Khilji banned alcohol, broke all wine utensils and expelled all wine makers from the city. Even after that, People used to drink wine covertly, preparing in their houses. They used to get wine from different sources in the city. According to Afif, Firoz Tuglaq used to drink saffron, pink and white wine. Toddy drinking was prevalent in Sultanate period. Allauddin banned it along with hemp and others alcoholic beverages.

## Reference

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