

Cuisine and Practice of Eating in the Sultanate of Delhi

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Abstract: *After the conquest of Punjab by the Ghaznavids and the establishment of their rule, a large number of Muslim immigrants came from different countries and settled down there. Many of them joined administrative posts and were posted in different territories. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, this was further enlarged and strengthened. Most of these people came from Central Asian lands. A number of them intermarry with different cultural backgrounds having different dietary habits. This intermixing led to the development of a new culture called Indo-Muslim culture. So the culture and lifestyle of these people seem to have undergone various changes after their contact with people from other areas and the local Indians. Their contacts and mingling with local people continued, because of which their cuisine also became Indianized. A huge number of crops, fruits, and vegetables were produced in India which was also mentioned by contemporary sources. On the other hand, numerous foods were introduced by the Muslims and gained popularity during the sultanate period and continued during the later periods too. Thus, in this paper, an attempt is made to fill the gap which exists in the dietary habits of the people during the time of the Delhi sultanate, different dishes, and food provided in the royal kitchen as well as consumed by the common people, the public kitchens, different ingredients etc. This paper aims to fill the gap which exists in the food habits of the people in medieval north India. The source material for the study would be contemporary historical literature, travel accounts and the malfuzat literature.*

Keywords: Delhi sultanate, Royal kitchen, Meal, Dishes, Halwa, Langars, Betel Leaf

Food plays an important role in the life and culture of people. Different cultures have different food and ingredients. They eat different foods according to their cultural backgrounds. Contemporary chroniclers make mention that some of the foods were common, but others vary from place to place. All over Northern India, the categories of cereals generally in use consisted of rice, wheat, millets, pulses, barley, gram, and the articles of food including fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, milk, ghee, oil and animal fat.¹ Few

food restrictions were followed by the Muslims as Islam did not permit those, for example, pork, carrion, blood, alcohol and some other intoxicants. Animals must be slaughtered according to the Islamic method, which is called *Halal*.²

The contemporary sources refer to a number of dishes that were prepared by the people for their meals. The author of *Masalikul Absar* informs us that most of the Indian people liked wheat which was sold for a *dirham hastkhani* and half the man.³ A second important crop which was mentioned by different authors was rice. In various regions, different qualities of rice were cultivated like *basmati*, *Kajari*, *ratnari*, *madhukar*, *dhela*, *jhenasari*, *ghiu*, *kandau*, *kunwarbilasu*, *rambas*, *lanhchaur vachi* etc.⁴ As many as 21 kinds of rice were cultivated. Apart from this many kinds of drugs and vegetables,⁵ sesame, all kinds of pulses, millet, mustered oil, ginger, onion, squash, hemp brinjal and various other vegetables were grown in India.⁶ Salt, both sea and rock, sugar, refined and black, onion, spices, ghee, animal fat, mustard oil, and vinegar make principal supplements to the diet of the people.⁷ Amir Khusrau also point out different kinds of pulses such as *moong*, gram, *mash*, were produced.⁸ However, a number of dishes were prepared with rice in different traditions. A dish known as *Khichri* was prepared by mixing rice with pulses. Some of them took in the breakfast.⁹ It was a principal dish of the *mashaikh*.¹⁰ The author of *siyarul-Arifin* informs us that sometimes it was cooked with rice with milk and sugar,¹¹ sometimes with only milk, or salt and sometimes mixed with roasted fowl.¹²

While talking about the meals Ziauddin Barani informs us about Imad ul Mulk, the *Amir-i-Ariz* (paymaster-general) of Sultan Balban, who used to take his afternoon meal with his staff. The Amir is said to have served the meal for years on his behalf. Different kinds of dishes were prepared and served fifty to sixty trays of food consisting of the bread of fine flour, the meat of sheep, young pigeons, chicken, roasted cakes, sweets, *sharbat*, drinks and betel leaves.¹³ Ibn Battuta mentions that they prepared different dishes for their meal, starting with bread, and thin round cakes, then they take roasted meat, after that meat cooked in ghee and then take *sambosa*, made of meat mashed and cooked with dry fruits and spices. Apart from these there was another dish of rice, cooked in ghee with chicken (modern *pulao*) and several sweet dishes, *halva* and pudding.¹⁴ The contemporary sources mention that different dishes were prepared with fish was taken in the meals. The author also mentions that sometimes mangoes were also sliced and served with fish.¹⁵

Meals in Royal Kitchen:

In the royal kitchens of the sultanate period, enormous varieties of food were prepared with luxury items which show their superiority and power in the society. The emperor and numerous other nobles had a different kind of exquisite delicious food on their tables. We shall discuss some manners or customs of these kitchens. After all the arrangements of different food, the trays were placed at the dining table and the eaters had to wait till the charge gave them a signal to eat. Shihabuddin Al-Umari based on Indian travellers

to Arabia informs us that in the royal palaces, the meal was served twice a day, morning and evening.¹⁶ Amir Khusrau gives us a meticulous list of varieties of foods served in the royal banquets and kitchens and the orders in which the dishes were to be served. He also mentioned the manners which the guests observe while taking their meal. Khusrau tells us about a banquet hosted by Sultan Kaiqubad (1287-90) in honour of his father's visit, Bughra Khan to his court. He says, 'first of all the waiters served the guests with refreshing soft drinks made of fruits juice and sugar candy (*sharbat*), then they served varieties of bread as *Nan-i-Tanuri*, made of fine flour, ghee or clarified butter stuffed with sweet paste and dry fruits and baked in an oven, and *Kak* (thin and buttered bread, savoury in taste). Then they brought dishes of meat and cereal. He also mentions *samosa* (*samosa* of modern times), made in a triangular shape and a kind of patty stuffed with minced meat and dry fruits, such as almonds and pistachios, etc., then roasted kid, tongue and head of the goat, fried leg of lamb, skinned and stuffed goats, the tail of *dumba*, different types of birds, chicken, partridge, quail, button quail etc. Apart from these, a number of sweet dishes, especially the *halwa* and *sabuni*, (sugar candy mixed with dry fruits and saffron and fried in ghee). In the end, the betel leaves were served.¹⁷ Khusrau also mentioned some more dishes in his *Ijaz-i-Khusravi*. He made a mention of roasted chicken and pudding prepared with cotton seeds mixed with rice and milk.¹⁸

Ibn Battuta, the Moorish traveller, who lived in the court of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, also mentions about two types of dinners given by the kings viz. private and public dinners. In the private dinner, Sultan himself was present along with the family members while the public dinner was headed by the chief palace officer. When the dishes were served the chief officer stood and praises the sultan after which he bowed to the sultan followed by the people present at that dinner. All remained in their places and did not move till the discourse was over. Everyone occupied his seats and had before him the set of different dishes, and no one shared a plate with another.¹⁹

Ibn Battuta further mentions how the members of the royal families took their meals daily along with their relatives, guests and a number of other associates. He also mentions the dishes served at the dining table that how the meal was served and food was taken by the people. He talks about a meal which was prepared for *Khuda-wand zada* Qiwam ud-Din, *qazi* of Tirmidh, in which he was also present. He mentions the dishes which were prepared and presented before them. He said that before the meal the chamberlain (*Hajib*) stood at the head of the dinner carpet and took a bow towards the sultan then all the presents followed him. He says this was the *khidmat* which in India means bowing down on knees as in prayers, probably for respect. He says that when we sit down to eat, the first thing they served in vessels of gold, silver and glass was sugared water, which they called *shurba* (*sherbet*) and drink it in the beginning to eat. The chamberlain then says *Bismillah* (in the name of God), which is a signal to start the meal. After that served bread, followed by large pieces of roasted meat (such that one sheep makes four or

six pieces) they put one piece before a single person. Then they served round dough cakes baked with ghee, which they stuff with the sweet called *sabuniya*. On the top of each dough cake, they put a sweet cake called *khishti* (in their language) which was made of flour, sugar and ghee. After that, they served large porcelain bowls of meat cooked with ghee, onion, and green ginger. This was followed by something they called *samusak* (triangular *samosa*) made of meat hashed and cooked with almonds, walnuts pistachios, onion and spices. They serve four to five pieces before one person. Then they serve rice cooked in ghee with chickens on its top followed by *hashimi* and then set down *qahiriya*. When they finished eating they are given jugs of *fuqqa* (barley water) to drink. After drinking this they are given betel leaves and areca nuts. When they have taken betel and areca nut the chamberlain again says *bismilla* and then they withdrew from there.²⁰

For the meal of Sultan Ala-ud-din animals like goat, sheep, black buck, antelope, spotted deer, swamp deer, sambhar, partridge, quail, cranes, peafowls, pigeons, swamp partridge, green pigeons, and others were collected.²¹ Muslims took meat in their meals. Barani Mentions that the meat of goat, pigeon and chicken was taken in the meal.²²

The *kitab nama-i Nasir Shahi* reveals that new additions were made to the traditional dishes under the impact of new immigrants, especially from central Asia and Iran. Some new dishes were found in this work. The writer also tells us about the method of daily cooking in the royal kitchen. He also mentions the different ingredients needed for the cooking of a particular dish. The mention of *biryani* (rice red coloured with saffron and cooked with meat, dry fruits and spices) for the first time, while *shorba*, *qima* (fried minced meat) mentioned as *qima-i-Ghiyas Shah* after Sultan Ghiyasuddin Shah, and *Sambosa* being the traditional dishes. Apart from this number of *halvas* was also mentioned by him.²³

Sometimes the Sufi saints along with their disciples were also invited by the rich people to their meals. Once a rich person in Delhi invited Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya to his dinner and the Shaikh along with his disciple and other people came and enjoyed the meal. They were served with *Nan*, *qur* and meat.²⁴ The common dishes of the royal kitchen were churned curd, *kjahur*, meat and meat-soup (*ash*) *pratha*, *halwa*, and *harisa*.²⁵ Mushtaqi informs us that during the Lodi period, 'different kinds of food were set in the trays for different persons and sent to their respective houses. Whatever dish the sultan (Sikandar Lodi) specified in the name of the recipient at the time of his first entry into the royal court, the same dish is to be spent in his place till the end. There was no alteration whatsoever.'²⁶ Battuta mentions that in the royal kitchen, there was a well-established body of cooks, bakers, tasters, and utensil cleaners in both sultans as well as nobles' kitchens.²⁷ Mushtaqi also informs us about the huge kitchens maintained by the nobles. He tells that the larger the kitchen a noble maintained the more generous and large-hearted he was considered by the public. One of the leading nobles of Sultan Sikandar Lodi, Miyan Gadai Farmuli had hundreds of camels to carry foodstuffs,

cauldrons and cooking utensils beside the kitchen staff when he accompanied the sultan or a military expedition.²⁸ Asad Khan was one of the prominent nobles of the time of Sikandar Lodi. He had an exalted notion of generosity. Whenever the dining cloth was spread before him at meal time he first filled in large china plates with food on which he put great quantities of bread and other eatables, and on them a gold *mohar*, all of which he gave to beggars, then he began to eat.²⁹ Mutahhar mentions different varieties of dishes served to him in the *Madrasah-i-Firoz Shahi* and these consisted of the meat of partridges, of young pigeons of large fowls, of starlings, of fat cocks and hill bred goat-kids. They were stuffed with pomegranates, sugar, and almonds, and were perfumed with saffron, sandal juice and musk.³⁰

Non-Vegetarian Dishes:

A large number of non-vegetarian dishes were prepared for which numerous animals were slaughtered such as goats, sheep, deer, buffalo, camel, horse, birds, cocks, pigeons etc. Al Umari, mentions that 'here in India different kinds of foods are sold in the markets, fried meat, roasted meat, *Mutanjan* (prepared by rice, sweet and saltosh mixed with meat), sweet meat of sixty-five types, juice of fruits and *sharbats* of nice quality which are hard to be found anywhere else.³¹ After establishing Muslim rule in the country the contact between the Indian population with them increased which increased dishes prepared with meat, because the majority of the Muslims were non-vegetarian. According to the author of *Masalik-ul Absar* the general food of the Indians (Muslims) contained beef and goat flesh. There was no scarcity of sheep, but still beef was preferred by the Muslims. Beef and mutton were sold at the same price, while pigeons, sparrows and other birds were sold at fewer prices.³² Contemporary sources mention that numerous dishes were prepared with meat. Among them, *Seekh-Kawab* was my favourite one.³³ The meat roasted on skewer emitted such a fragrant smell that a present of it was made to the nobles and sultans. Sometimes a whole goat was roasted. Ibn Battuta mentions that large pieces of roasted meat were served at dinners.³⁴ He also mentions the eating of the flesh of a slaughtered horse by a party of Turks, who were accompanying him from Abohar to Ayodhya.³⁵ According to the author of *Sirat-i-Firoz Shahi* the tribal people of Orissa used the flesh of buffalo in their meals. They also took the water from the coconut.³⁶ Timur mentions the eating of hogs' flesh by the people of Sarsuti.³⁷ Thus we got a reference to pork, that when the Hindus got ascendancy in the Rudauli area, pork was publicly sold in the market.

Dishes of Commoners:

As far as the dishes and the food habits of the common people during the sultanate period are concerned, we did not find too much information from contemporary sources. Al-Biruni (11th c.) informs us that the Hindus (Indians) eat singly i.e. one by one, on the tablecloth of dung, and the plates which they used were thrown away if they were earthen. Before every meal, they drink wine. They chew areca nuts with betel leaves and chalk, the result of which

is their teeth became red. They sip the stall of the cows but did not eat their meat.³⁸ He gives us a list of lawful and unlawful animals to eat by the Indians. He mentions that only certain animals are allowed to kill using strangulation, and others were forbidden. The list of animals which are allowed for killing are sheep, goats, gazelles, hares, rhinoceroses (*gandha*), buffaloes, fish, water and land birds, such as the sparrow, ring-doves, francolins, doves, peacocks, and other animals which are not loathsome to man nor noxious. Those which are forbidden include cows, horses, mules, camels, elephants, tame poultry, crow, parrots, nightingales, all kind of eggs and wine. They were also not allowed to sell the meat.³⁹ Shihabuddin Al-Umari while talking about the general food of the Indians mentions that beef and goat flesh was liked by the people of India. Once he asked Shaikh Mubarak about the scarcity of sheep and the latter replied it was mere matter of habit for all the villages of India, there are sheep in thousands.⁴⁰ Battuta mentions that he enjoyed a dish that the Indians prepared for *shamakh*, that after gathering the seeds of *shamakh*, they put out it in the sun and make a gruel which they cooked with the milk of buffalo, then baked as bread and eat it. Some of the cereals and crops which Indians sow and use for food were *kudhru*, *qal*, *shamakh* were the millets, *mash*, *munj* (moong), *Hirira*, *Lubiya* (a kind of bean), *mut* (a kind of millet), barley, wheat, rice, chickpeas, lentils, sesame, sugarcane etc. Besides these, the local dish of *kisri* (*khichri*) also gains popularity among the people they cook by mixing *monj* (moong pulse) with rice and eating it with ghee for everyday breakfast.⁴¹ Another dish of the Muslims was *nihari* made of beef which is eaten with bread for breakfast in the morning.⁴² The dish of *Khichri* is mostly used by common people as well as nobles for breakfast, along with ghee.⁴³ The *qur* seemed to have been baked of different sizes and weights and could be preserved for up to twenty days. The *nan* was split into two and *qurs* into six pieces. Once Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya sent a *qur* to Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh whose weight was about two seers, it was eaten with *halva*.⁴⁴ The same text mentions that people usually eat *khichri* when they suffered from stomach pain.⁴⁵

The poet Muthar of Kara mentions that in the *Madrassa-i-Firuz Shahi* (college of Firoz Shah) a number of dishes were served on the dining carpet. These dishes are pheasants, partridges, herons, fowl, fish, roasted chicken, roasted kid and beef curry. Apart from these, there are various sweet dishes including the delicacy, *lauz* (pudding made of rice boiled in milk, mixed with dry fruits, almonds, pistachios, raisin, and saffron, now called *firni*).⁴⁶ The types of bread heaped on the dining carpet are mentioned as *qurs* and *nans* along with *khisht*, dry and wet. As usual, the *sharbat* of pomegranate and other fruits was served before food while the *biras* (betel leaves) served at the end.⁴⁷ Barani mentions that for the maintenance of regulations of the market which was under *diwan-i-riyast*, Sultan Aluddin Khalji make sure that the rates of different commodities should be low. The Sultan also brings ordinance that all the commodities connected to the bazaars from cap to stockings, comb to the needle, sugar to vegetables, pottage (*harisah*) to broth, *sabuni* sweet meat to *reori*, dry bread to roasted, *bhiti* bread, fish betel leaf, colour, areca nut and flowers

should be present there in all markets.⁴⁸ Mushtaqi mentions that *do-piyaza* (curry made of meat and onion), *khichri*, *halwas* and pickles become the common features of Indo-Muslim culture.⁴⁹ He also mentions that the nobles also took their meals along with their associates and also had food distributed among the poor, gathered outside their houses or mansions.⁵⁰ Wheat, bread, baked (*roti*), and fried (*puri*) were eaten with *dal*, vegetables and meat, cooked in *tandurs* and open ovens *chullas*.⁵¹ *Khichri* and *sattu* were the common diets of common people.⁵²

Babur in his *Baburnama* also mentions about the Indian dishes that roasted hare, fried carrots and dried meat are delicious and loved by foreigners. Even the non-vegetarian dishes of India did not take any similarity to those of central Asia. He called these dishes Indian dishes.⁵³ Unfortunately, we did not have too much information about the way in which the common people took their meals. The *Sufra* or *dastarkhan* which means a piece of cloth spread on the ground on which food was laid out and around which the guests squatted and the *chamcha* or spoon formed a common feature. There was no table knife. People used their hands in taking food.⁵⁴ If the guest was invited to a dinner, the host was to help him in washing his hands. But first of all the host was to wash his own hands.⁵⁵ Visitors were entertained with food, fruit and *pan* (betel leaf).⁵⁶ Mostly *sharbat* and *pan* were served to the guests.⁵⁷

Vegetables:

We get references to the consumption of vegetables in the literature of the period under the survey. Different categories of vegetables were taken by the people. Some people took only vegetables, for example, Battuta mentions in his *Rehla* that Jogis usually took vegetables.⁵⁸ Vegetable was also one of the principal items of food with the Sufi saints. It is said that Muslim widows consumed a good deal of vegetables.⁵⁹ Many kinds of vegetables like pumpkins, *aroi*, *torai*, *chickiras*, *denrasas*, *parwars*, *Korallis* etc. were cooked and formed items of food.⁶⁰ Mostly the Hindus were vegetarians. They cooked vegetables by frying them in ghee and taken with various kinds of pickles (*achars*) prepared from green mangoes as well as ginger and chilies.⁶¹ According to Al-Umari Beans is not cultivated in India. He mentions the reason that it is a country of philosophers and thinkers who consider it harmful to intellect. Likewise, the Sabeans have also forbidden the use of beans.⁶² Different preparations were made of these vegetables; chopped gram was mixed with *arui*, *Torais* and *chichiras* and *denrasis* were fried. Slices of apples were cooked.⁶³ We also got Reference to the eating of *sag* (preparation of vegetable leaves). People were fond of eating *sag*, *sag of sarso*, *soa*, *bathu* etc.⁶⁴ Curded milk formed an important part of the peasant's diet. Lemon juice, milk curd and sweets were taken by the people.⁶⁵

References are found of *jughrat* (curd), *panir* (cheese), *paluda* or *faluda* (a kind of flummery or liquid sweetmeat) *sakbat* (a kind of victual prepared with meat, vinegar, dry fruits like pistachio and others mixed together), *lozina* (a kind of sweetmeat in which almond is mixed), *zaliba-i-nabat* (probably *jelabi*, sweets of

modern day) and *fuqqa* (a kind of barley drink).⁶⁶ We are also informed about the drinking of milk mixed with dry fruits.⁶⁷ *Karhi* was prepared. *Tahri* was cooked.⁶⁸ Reference is also found to the taking of eggs.⁶⁹ In *Lataif-i-Ashrafi* we get a long list of articles with a full account of its food value. *Siyar ul Auliya* speaks about the consumption of *pelu* and *delah* by the Sufi saints.⁷⁰ K. A. Nizami mentions *delah*, a wild fruit on thorny plants which is found in Punjab and people use it as food.⁷¹

Fruits:

In the Sultanate period, people used to eat different fruits in their respective seasons. Our sources give a long list of fruits such as pomegranates, grapes, apples, melons, bananas, apricot, peaches, citron, lemon, oranges, sycamore, black mulberries, melons, water-melon, figs, yellow and green cucumbers (*khira* and *kakri*), mangoes, *khirnis*, *jamuns*, Indian dates, etc. Sihabuddin Al Umari who collected his information from travellers, mentions that, 'here in India juice of fruits and *sharbats* of nice quality which are hard to be found anywhere else. The guava is found there but was also imported. Pears and apples are also found in smaller numbers as compared to guava. Besides, there are other delicious fruits. The coconut is very good in taste. The banana was brought to Delhi in plenty as it was not planted in this area. Sugarcane with its numerous varieties abounds in India. However, the best among its varieties which were produced only in India was black with a very hard cover, which was excellent for chewing.⁷² Amir Khusrau mentions *Angur* (grapes), *mawez* (dried raisin), *khurma* (a date) *turanj* (citron-like orange), *badam* (almond)⁷³ Barani mentions that thick jungles of mangoes are found around Delhi.⁷⁴ Battuta also mentions the import of fruits from Khurasan, the couriers put these fruits in woven baskets like plates and carry them with great speed to the sultan.⁷⁵ While describing mango fruit Battuta tells us that its tee resembles that of an orange. The size of the mango is of a large pear. When it is green and not yet ripe fully, people pick those which fall and pickled them as they pickled lime and lemon. However, they also pickle green ginger and clusters of pepper which they eat with meat dishes. When the mango fruit ripens in autumn, its colour became yellow and people eat it like an apple. Some of them cut it with a knife while other simply sucks it. It is sweet in taste, with a little acidity mingled with sweetness.⁷⁶

Battuta mentions the best fruits of India are *Shaki* and *barki*, and their fruit comes out of their trunk. (The *shaki* is like a large gourd and weighs 25-30 pounds. A single shaki provides a meal to four to five persons).⁷⁷ He mentions the sweet oranges which were found in plenty while the bitter ones are seldom found. He mentions a third category of oranges which was in between sweet and bitter and is small in size but excellent in flavour which Battuta used to enjoy while eating.⁷⁸ Apart from these fruits, he gives a long list which consists of the fruits of *tandu* (of emboy tree), apricot (which were very sweet), *chumun* (whose fruits resemble olive, orange, *mohwa*, walnut, grapes, olive, *kasira*, chestnut, pomegranate, cucumber, watermelon, apple etc.⁷⁹

Betel Leaves:

The contemporary authors closely noticed the importance of betel leaf. It was a common habit of the people to chew betel leaves because their country was hot and the inner part of their bodies are cold, the natural warmth becomes feeble in them, and the power of designation is so weak that they must strengthen it by eating the leaves of *betel* after dinner and by chewing the betel nut, which inflames the heat of the body, the chalk on the betel leaves dries up everything wet, and the betel nut acts as an astringent on the teeth, the gums, and the stomach.⁸⁰

Jyotirisvara in *Varna Ratnakara* gives thirteen qualities of betel leaves.⁸¹ Amir Khusrau regarded betel as a fruit and to him, there was no fruit better than the betel leaf.⁸² These betel leaves were also taken by the nobles, we find references to Imad ul Mulk who was a slave under Iltutmish but later attained high posts of *Amir-i-Ariz* (paymaster general of the army) under sultan Balban, had a habit of chewing betel leaves at short intervals. Not only this, he always distributed among the people present in his residence or in his camp.⁸³ Fifteen to sixty slaves attended his assemblies for bringing in fresh relays of betel leaf alone.⁸⁴ Ibn Battuta also refers to the good quality of betel leaves used by the people.⁸⁵ It was considered kindness to their manners to serve betel leaves among the guests. When all the services of the meal came to an end, then they distribute the betel leaves among the guests who chewed them gently.⁸⁶ After dinner betel leaves and nuts were served.⁸⁷

We also got references from the *Malfuzat* literature. Baba Farid and his chief disciple Shaikh Nizam-ud- din Auliya of Delhi, and Hazrat Sharf-ud-din Yahya and many others were very fond of betel leaves. We learn from *Fawa'id-ul-Fuwad* that once the saint of Delhi said jocularly that outside India when basin and ewer were brought after a meal, people took it that the meal was over but in India, the purpose was served by the offer of *tambul* (betel leaves) and it was called *Abul Yas* (father of despair).⁸⁸ *Ahsan al Aqval*, a collection of Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib's (d. 1337) utterances mentions that the guests were made to clean their hands after the meal was over. After it, the servants brought *biras* along with pieces of betel nut in trays. The urbanised guests picked up the *bira* opened his mouth a little so as not to show the inside of his mouth to others and put it inside carefully. The pieces of betel nut were also put in the mouth one by one.⁸⁹

However, these betel leaves have high demand in the metropolitan cities and are supplied quality leaves from different regions as far as Gujarat.⁹⁰ Khusrau further mentions the reason for the popularity of this betel leaf among the rich as well as poor, was a belief that it had digestive properties that served as a stimulant in laziness, arrested the decay of teeth and control bad breath.⁹¹ He tells that fresh betel leaf was liked to some extent, but the old betel leaf was liked very much.⁹² Al-Shibli tells us that the most respectful way for Indians to entertain the guests was with betel leaf. If a person entertains his guests with various kinds of eatables, *sharbats* (drinks), sweet meat, perfumes and flowers and does not offer betel leaf to them it means that

he has not been a good host. Similarly, when an important man has to oblige some acquaintance, he offers him a betel leaf.⁹³ Al-Umari mentions that the betel leaf perfumes the breath, helps digestion, cheers up the spirit, strengthens the intellect and memory and is delightful in taste.⁹⁴ Afif also tells us in his account that, Sultan Firuz Shah weekly visits his cousin Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq, after a customary exchange of courtesy and entertainment at the time of departure he was offered the betel leaf by her servant.⁹⁵ In his *waqiat-i-Mushtaqi* the author gives detailed information about the importance of *bira* or betel leaf.⁹⁶ Abdul Razzaq lavishes a lot of praise on the *pan* and says, "*pan* gives colour to and brightens the countenance, causes intoxication similar to that produced by wine, appeases hunger and excites appetite. It removes the disagreeable smell from the mouth and strengthens the teeth."⁹⁷ Jyotirisvara tells us that in Mithila people washed their mouths after the meal, used tooth-picks and then took betel leaf along with *Srihatti ke ilachi*, *Lakhnauti supari* and *saahar* of Tirhut.⁹⁸ Amir Khurd speaks of his uncle who was very fond of betel leaf. Once there was such a scarcity of it that the price of it had raised to ten *tankas* per piece.⁹⁹ Ibn Battuta says that betel leaves together with betel nut and lime were chewed.¹⁰⁰ Lime formed part of the combination of betel, Khusrau refers to *chuna sopari* on many occasions.¹⁰¹ In festive assemblies betel was distributed.¹⁰² The hagiological literature of the period tells us that the visitors at the saint's house were served with something. They were not allowed to go back without taking anything. If nothing was available, a pot full of water was placed before the guest.¹⁰³ The guests were also served *Khilal* (toothpicks) after the meal.¹⁰⁴

Rain water was used by the people for a drink which was collected in large reservoirs in the rainy seasons.¹⁰⁵ By different sultans of Delhi, an abundant supply of water was procured and maintained. For example, Sultan Iltutmish built *Hauz* in Delhi for the supply of drinking water.¹⁰⁶ Ibn Battuta also informs us that there was a big reservoir outside Delhi by the name of Sultan Iltutmish from where the inhabitants of Delhi took their water for drinking. It was about a mile in breadth and two miles in length and was fed by rainwater.¹⁰⁷ Sultan Alauddin Khalji also constructed a reservoir called *Hauz-i-Khas* which was even larger than that of Sultan Iltutmish.¹⁰⁸ In the summer the water was cooled in the earthen pots. The houses of the Sufi saints were furnished with earthen pots for preserving drinking water and for cooking purposes. There is a reference in the *malfuz* of Hazrat Sharf-ud-din Yahya Maneri, the 14th century Firdausi saint of Bihar, to the use of '*badhna-i-ab*'.¹⁰⁹ People drew water from the *baolis*. The Mewatis used to molest the male servants who went to draw water. They would strip them off, and make them naked and take away their garments.¹¹⁰ In cases of snake bite a certain line of the Quran was read out on the water three times and it was considered a good sign if the patient could sip that.¹¹¹ However, the sultans and nobles used to distribute free water and *sharbat* among the common people on special occasions such as festivals or to celebrate some victory.¹¹²

References are also found in *Lakhnavali* to the provision of drinking water

for travellers and wayfarers. There were many *paniyashahs* (drinking places). Water was stored in big earthen pots. Scented water was also served.¹¹³ Amir Khusrau refers to milkmen who diluted milk with water.¹¹⁴ It was the practice among the Afghans in Delhi to offer cold water, betel leaf, *kharkari* and sugar on the third day of the death. The Afghan Sultan abolished this practice and introduced that of offering rose and rose water because the old custom was beyond the means of an Afghan. It was because of this fact that if an Afghan of small means died, a hundred thousand clansmen would come and call upon him.¹¹⁵ Once Sultan Sikandar came to the *Khanqah* of Shaikh Fakhr-ud-din Zahid, there was no sugar. The Shaikh asked one of his attendants to extract sugar from the sweetmeat (*shirni*) and prepare the *sharbat* for the sultan.¹¹⁶

Wine:

During the sultanate drinking wine in the company of friends and parties became a common practice. Al-Biruni informs us that among the four classes, Sudras are allowed to only drink the wine but not sell it.¹¹⁷ The author of *Taj-ul-Maasir* informs us that lovers drank emerald-like wine (*Sharab-i-Raihan*) in front of their sweethearts.¹¹⁸ We find references in contemporary sources that a number of sultans indulged in this practice. Sultan Qutub-Uddin-Aibak and Sultan Iltutmish indulged in such type of gaiety.¹¹⁹ Nobles held wine parties in their houses to which they invited their friends.¹²⁰ Balban as a *malik* and *khan* was known for the consumption of wine at parties and festive assemblies.¹²¹ The historian compared Sultan Muizuddin's reign with that of Bahram Ghor because during his rule people had nothing to do but to be immersed in pleasure and, indulgence and to organize pleasure parties and drink wine, sing-song and hear music and remain engaged in all these pleasure activities.¹²² In fact, many social groups in Muslim society were victims of the habit of drinking wine.¹²³ Barani gave one of the reasons for rebellions during the time of sultan Alauddin Khalji as the drinking of wine people organized parties where they gave vent to their emotions, made friends and resorted to rebellions and caused seditions.¹²⁴ Not only the drunkard and voluptuous Sultans like Kaiqubad and Mobarak Khilji but also a puritanical and orthodox Sultan like Firoz Shah was not free from addiction to wine.¹²⁵ The author of *Masalik-ul-Absar* appears to have gathered a good impression of Indians when he says: "The inhabitants of India have little taste" (of wine)¹²⁶ because the sultan is particularly very severe against it and dislikes the drunkards very much. They rather prefer to take betel leaf as the subordinate or alcoholic drink.¹²⁷ One of the *Khan* of Delhi was so much addicted to wine that he did not give up even after the sultan's (Muhammad bin Tughlaq) advice. When the sultan knew about him he got too much angry that he arrested him and confiscated his wealth.¹²⁸ Once accidentally Tatar Khan arrived while Firoz Shah was drinking wine. The Sultan did not like his presence at that time. So he concealed the wine cup under the cot on which he was sitting.¹²⁹ Besides wine, opium and leaves of hemp (*bhang*)¹³⁰ were used as intoxicants by some of the then people. Babur mentions that when the

dinner was served the Hindustani jugglers were brought and performed their tricks. Tumblers and rope dancers exhibited their feats.¹³¹

Sweets:

Sweet dishes were served both during and at the end of the meal, which included *sabuniya*, different types of *halwas*, soft nut brittle, lauz (modern day *firni*), pudding prepared by boiling the rice in milk and a mixture of almonds, pistachios, raisins and saffron, *tutmaj* etc.¹³² The *halva* (the consumption of meat and sweetmeat), rich and poor alike, led to the setting up of bakeries, restaurants, and shops of butchers and confectioners (called *Dukanha-i-tabbakhan-o-halva'yan*) in the towns and cities.¹³³ Sweet cakes called *khishti* (a preparation of flour, sugar and ghee) were taken.¹³⁴ However, there were different kinds of *halvas*. Among them the *halva-i-Gajar*, made of carrot mixed with dry fruits and saffron and some herbs was famous. The halva was cooked during the winter season. Sijzi in his *Fawa'id* shows that a number of ingredients were mixed for a dish, and a person could hardly be recognise a dish before one tasted it.¹³⁵ References to *shewai*,¹³⁶ and *tutmaj*, a sweet dish of that time which was prepared with milk, rice and dry fruit, mixed with sugar candy and then cooked are also found. Sultan Kaiqubad seems to have been fond of *tutmaj*.¹³⁷ We get frequent references to sweetmeats and also some of their varieties in our literature like *halwa-i-sabuni*¹³⁸ and *halwa-i-gajar*.¹³⁹ The people used the milk of cows, buffaloes, goats and sheep. They also prepared numerous dishes of milk such as cream, curd, butter, and ghee which were used in day-to-day life. Sometimes they made *kheer* i.e. by cooking rice with milk.

Public Kitchens (*Langars*):

The Sultan and nobles maintained large kitchens (*matbakhs*) while travellers, especially traders, and others bought cooked food from the shops. The Sufi saints and philanthropists spent lavishly on the maintenance of public kitchens called *langers*, where free food was distributed daily among the poor people.¹⁴⁰ The Sufi saints used to teach the people such manners. We have an example of the spiritual successor of Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325), Shaikh Burhanuddin Gharib who used to teach his disciples (*murids*) how to serve food among peoples 'First help the guests then wash their hands, place loaves of bread on the carpet and then other dishes such as meat soup called *shorba* etc. Then the food should be started by reciting the name of God, *Bismillah*, and nobody should dip his spoon in the bowl containing food for numerous guests as it created a feeling of dislike among others.¹⁴¹

However *malfuzat* sources such as *Khair-ul-Majalis* (collection of utterances) of Shaikh Nasiruddin Chiragh of Delhi (d. 1356) gives us information about the dietary habits of the common people. A huge amount of expenditure was spent by the rich people for the maintenance of public kitchens and Sufi saints through the distribution of free food to the common people, and the eating place and shops owned by the caterers. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya (d. 1325)

used to break his daily fasts after sunset with a piece of *qurs* (round stuffed bread).¹⁴²

The public Kitchens, *langars* were maintained by the Sufi saints and other religious-minded people for the benefit of the poor, the visitors to the *khanqah* and the travellers. It was considered an act of piety by the rich people to serve food to the poor every day. The Sufis maintained large kitchens for the public with *futuh* (unasked for offering both in cash and kind) while the rich people made endowments for their maintenance. Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya is reported to have said that feeding the poor had been recommended and praised by all the religions of the world. He also exhorted his followers that no discrimination should be made against anybody and to feed them irrespective of creed.¹⁴³ However, a huge population also exists which cannot afford food for themselves. Once when one of his disciples insisted on his taking of *sahri*, Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya said: "How the food would go down his throat when indigent persons and *darvoeshes* slept without food in the corner of the mosque and front of shops".¹⁴⁴ The poor people gathered around the Tombs and shrines of the Sufi saints to importuning the faithful for alms. The houses and mansions of the rich were thronged on days of festivals by the poor, the indigent, and the blind, the lame and paralyzed ones begging for alms.¹⁴⁵ The Sufis took *bhat* (rice), *kak* (cake), *khichri* (boiled rice mixed with a pulse), *nan* (bread cooked in the oven), *jughrat* (curd), *sarid* (bread soaked in meat soup).¹⁴⁶

Thus the advancement of Ghaznavids towards the east made great progress in bridging the two cultures i.e. Central Asia and India. A great number of migrations from different cultural backgrounds, having different dietary habits and tastes, came and settled in different parts of the country. Resultantly they made a great impact on the already existing dietetics of the people. A great number of rich dishes were introduced by these people, mostly in the royal kitchens, prepared by mixing a large number of ingredients, which by the passage of time become a daily routine of common masses too. Some of these dishes remain popular even today. From Albiruni to Babur almost all the sources have noticed very carefully the food culture of the Indians, e.g., the case of betel leaves after their meal. On the one hand, the royal kitchens prepared a number of dishes for the ruling class, while on the other hand public kitchens (*langars*) were maintained by the rich peoples and the Sufi saints on their *khanqas* (hospices) to feed the needy ones.

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