

FOOD AND CUISINE IN MUGHAL INDIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article focuses on food culture and food consumption in the creation of Mughal cultural Heritage in the south asia and shows how food consumption incorporates many aspects of the historical and cultural development in South Asia. The Mughal period was very significant from the gastronomical aspect in India. Mughals had introduced many dishes that enhance food availability and also created class divisions in the society. There were different varieties of food, such as royal food, commoners food, festive foods, ceremonial food, etc. which created distinct identity based on the consumption culture in Mughal India. This research also explores regional cuisine that gained importance with the emergence of regional powers in India. Lastly the paper examines the food culture of Mughals from a historical perspective by analysing the transformation and redefinition of gastronomy. The role and contributions of food to the formation of cultural heritage will also be examined.

Keywords: cultural heritage, gastronomy, identity, cuisine, food, Mughals

Introduction

Food is constantly perceived as an essential requirement for any living things. Through an endeavor at food studies, one can glimpse how the food is related to the people's lives in South Asian culture and moreover prepared to separate how the various social orders added to building the Indian food and preparing the society based on consumption. Hence, this paper becomes significant as the greater

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part of the talk on food is on nourishment, consuming less calories, handling food, hunger, and food poison. Fundamental studies on food are extensively studied within the framework of anthropology, sociology, and medical science, but unfortunately, Mughal food history remained silent in Indian historical writings.

Unlike many countries, India is one of the oldest civilisations continuing with many practices and traditions of the past and, taste is also one of the unique features associated to the understanding of the Indian Foodways. Gastronomy also has essential social elements that connect, or divide as the case may be, people specific food choices. The seventeenth century starts with the flourishing of the Mughal Empire and added new items in India's gastronomy. The Mughals had come to India with a rich socio-culture background, and it got mingled with the land so well that today's cultural heritage is difficult to see whose culture we are pursuing. The emergence of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century added more sparkling colours to the beauty of Indian culture in medieval India. Food and cuisine had a close relationship with people's livelihood throughout the Mughal era, and it gradually formed highly diverse Indian food and cuisine culture as a historical phenomenon.

The arrival of the Mughals added a new blend of Indo Persian culture, reached an apogee of refinement and beauty in the food culture of India. The Mughals were self-sufficient, self-explanatory, and even they had never faced the problem of being foreigners ruling over an alien land. (Mukhia, 2004; 1-4) The eighteenth century was the time when regional powers were becoming popular and they also contributed to the nature of food consumption in India. Changes in the political situation helped in the evolution of gastronomy and also paved the way for enriching the Indian food and cuisine. Indian culinary culture is a blend of multiple cultures and tradition and marks, even today, a special place in the world.

Food and Cuisine

Mughal Food and cuisine is one of the important links to understand the Indian food culture and also has gained lots of fame in the modern times. Food is a continuous process and an important part of traditional knowledge as it reflects patterns of cultural amalgamations. The gastronomy of the past empowers us to comprehend our social legacy and society. Food also catalyzes human evolution, as well as a spiritual and cultural link in society.

Interestingly, as far as proper food consumption is concerned, India has maintained its momentum and development from the

past. The gastronomy of Mughal India was always dynamic and mingled with so many cultures that not only enhanced the Indian food varieties, but also gave added strength to the country's cultural diversity. Food intake, in fact, connects people to their cultural or ethnic group through comparable eating habits. Notably, immigrants often use food as a means of retaining their cultural identity.

Food availability and consumption are frequently used as a barometer of one's status and dignity. The expression of hierarchy, social position, economic status, and prestige were attached to the kinds of food eaten and the availability of various dishes in the bygone times. Food reflects the choices, beliefs, passion, habits, status, and personality which have not been focused in medieval Indian history. Indeed food also conveys the idea of communication for one's individuality and one's place in the society (Anderson, 2005; 124). Food communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyle and other social position, hence it can be said to be a medium of communication in the social system. For instance, this food is "our food" and that food is "their food" is a marker in the society. Sometimes, these foodways of different sections in the society also attracts each other's food patterns and build a bond between two groups. So, food is also a medium to exchange ideas and notion of oneness in the society.

According to Ferguson, cuisine is 'the code that structures the practice of food and allows us to discuss and to represent taste'.(Ferguson, 2004; 18) Ferguson goes on to draw out certain conditions that must be fulfilled by a set of culinary practice in order to qualify as a cuisine: A more or less coherent repertory of culinary preparations, usually structured by the products at hand, becomes a true cuisine only when its status as a repertory becomes apparent. That is, culinary preparations becomes a cuisine only when the preparations are articulated and formalized, and enter the public domain. (Ferguson, 2004; 19) ¹Cuisine is also defined by a border or region with a restricted number of ingredients, which is determined by the territory's geology, climate, and history.(Mintz, 1996; 99) Though haute cuisine, also known as high cuisine, can be classified as a different category because it has no boundaries or restrictions in terms of ingredients.(Mintz, 1996; 100)

Mughal Food; Consumption of Pleasure and Royal Identity

In India, the foundation for cultural diversity existed in food consumption as well. The canvas of the Mughal history is very wide and has been looked from different perspectives in the Indian

history writings. In this paper, we have tried to emphasise food as an important element in the formation of our cultural heritage in the Mughal Empire. Albeit the Mughal history begins with the success on the Lodi's by Babur in 1526 in the principal clash of Panipat and finished the authority of force battle in India with the foundation of the Mughal Empire. Since the beginning Babur had gone through a difficult time in his life. In his memoir Babur writes,

“Hindustan is a country of no charms. Its people have no good looks; of social intercourse, paying and receiving visits there is none; of genius and capacity none; of manners, none; in handicraft and work there is no form or symmetry, method or quality; there are no good horses, no good dogs, no grapes, muskmelons or first-rate fruits, no ice or cold water, no good bread or cooked food in the bazars”. (Babur, 1922; 518)

From the initial days of his reign, the founder of the empire was dissatisfied with the kinds of food that was available in India. Through the Memoirs of Babur, we get an idea that there were no established gastronomical connections among the people during his reign in Hindustan. Food was not regarded as something which was a part of normal foodways during the Mughal period but it was also used as a weapon of war. Babur faced a problem when Ibrahim Lodi's aunt wanted to take a revenge on him. In order to do so, she took help from the cooks who worked in the kitchen and added poison in his food. Despite eating that food he escaped from danger and says that “an evil arrived and happily passed on, God gave me new birth, I am coming from that other world” (Babur, 1922; 542-543). Thus in the beginning itself, food was not merely used to feed someone in the Mughal Empire.

His immediate success or Humayun also could not contribute much to India's food culture as his period was full of turmoil. Thus, the major changes occurred in food culture from the period of his decedents . This was also the period when food consumption attributed to the prestige and royalty in society, resulting in the formation of different sections in society based on consumption. The eminence of Mughals was additionally checked by having tremendous sorts of food varieties with all luxuries, which demonstrated their social superiority and authority. (Habib, 2008; 144-145) For instance, the feast for the emperor and other nobles included many sorts of exquisites of food and every table contained royal delicacies ranging from birds to fish and beverages were made available. (Khwandmir, 1940; 41) The cooks of the royal Kitchen took lots of pain for preparing these dishes, but it was on them to choose the fruits and

meats from which they would make lavish dishes. (khwandmir, 1940; 40-41) Thus it can be seen that the varieties of food marked the royalty and their distinct position in the society. Indeed, the pan (betel leaf), water vessels with jeweled drinking vessels and utensils made of unadulterated gold and silver were used. (Begum, 2009; 123)

The presentation of food always marked the richness in the Mughal noble people along with status and symbol of power they pursue. Such practices continued for a longer period and added to Indian gastronomy. The royal women were not confined exclusively to the Harem but they were active members of the royal feast along with the emperor. Gulbadan Begum in her biography mentioned that a lavish feast occurred in the 1534 on a riverside in which many royal women participated and she talked about the sitting arrangements of that banquet. She says that the emperor along with Aka Janam sit together on the gold embroidered divan that was in front of the throne and on the right side of the Aka Janam's sat her aunt and other royal ladies. (Gulbadan, 2009, 118-120) One of the interesting parts of this feast was the symmetry because the whole function was held in an octagonal hall. There was an octagonal tank and platform where the Persian carpet had been placed for the musician to sit. (Gulbadan, 2009; 121) This can be considered a part of their lavish life style of having food with music or in other words music can be seen as a part of the happiness and joy of the royal people. As Gulbadan begum notes that "Young men and pretty girls and elegant women and musicians and sweet-voiced reciters were ordered to sit in the tank" (Gulbadan, 2009; 121-122)

It was from Akbar's period that the emperor started taking care of the food availability and the types of food that was made available for consumption. For instance, one of the contemporary historians in Akbar's time, Abu Fazl was of the opinion that the emperor took keen interest in the kitchen department with regard to food and had a lot of wise regulation for the food department. As far as his personal food is concerned, he ate very less in a day, often only once a day. He was not greedy or having lust for food because he always left his meal before getting fully satisfied (Abu Fazl, 1873; 51-80) and hence one can't attach gluttony with the emperor Akbar.

Even though he had no fixed time for his meal, the servants were always ready and within one hour, more than a hundred dishes were prepared. (Moosvi, 1994; 99-100) By this time, the political stabilisation helped in strengthening the food and cuisine and became more elaborate and lavish adoring when Akbar's successor

added gift giving rituals. In his period the cooked food was divided into three parts. First one was without meat popularly called as 'sufiyana', second one in which meat and rice were used and third one where meat is mixed with the spices. (Abu Fazl, 1873; 59) This also gives a separate identity and moreover added a horizon in the food culture. All the prepared items would have the seal of Mir Bakwal, the head of the kitchen department to avoid the unforeseen danger. However, the utensils were of gold and silver and would be covered with red cloth. (Abu Fazl, 1873; 56) In the context of bread, Abu Fazl mentioned about the various types of bread and their ingredients. First one prepared in oven which is large in size and mixed with milk, ghee, and salt. Secondly prepared on the iron plates but short in size and prepared with khushkah. The latter taste good when it was served hot.. (Abu Fazl, 1873; 61) Here the taste and showcase/plating of food items were important and played a major part in understanding the

foodways of the elite section of the society. The bread at the court were prepared of fine wheat flour along with other coarsely pounded flour and bran. (Abu Fazl, 1873; 61) The lavishness and splendor simply indicate that the elaborate system of food creates legitimacy and power in the society.

In this regard, one traveler, John Jourdain states that no one can come without a present into the court. (Ansari, 2009; 48-49) So the feast was not solely confined for eating but for expressing their respect towards the emperor. To substantiate this, Jahangir claimed in his memoirs that in his father's time, it was traditional for one of the great amirs to throw a feast every day and organise unique presents of diamonds, gem-studded vessels, rich fabrics, elephants, and horses, all in the hopes of persuading His Majesty to attend. (Jahangir,2009;76) Another traveler from Dutch, Francisco Pelsaert also confirmed that rich people were having lavish food, some of which were not known to his own country. The lavish feast consisted of many dishes like Brinj (dressed rice), Aeshelia (spiced meat), Pollaeb (pulao), Zueyla (spiced wheaten cakes), Dupiyaza (meat with onions), roast meat and other items but before consuming the food they washed their hands, and the table clothes would be put before them on floor. The head servant served everyone but they never used spoon, napkins, and knives to eat their food. (Pelsaert, 1925; 60-64) He further gives the table manners as well in which it was considered bad behavior to lick the fingers and food should not go beyond knuckles. (Pelsaert,1925; 60-63)

The description he provides clearly indicates that food intake was

not just limited to grandeur, but that food etiquette and the way in which it was consumed also became significant, distinguishing the aristocracy from the rest of society. Interestingly, this was the time when European traveler praised Indian cuisine and dishes. For instance, one of the contemporary traveler in the late sixteenth century, Van Linschoten, gives a detailed account for the preparation of mango pickle 'Achar'. He writes that 'Mangoes are gathered when they are green, and conserved for the most part in salted pots, and commonly used to be eaten with rice and mostly stuffed with green ginger and garlic'. (Linschoten, 1885; 26) He also compared the Indian mango pickle with the white Spanish Olives that produced a similar taste. (Linschoten, 1885; 26) Thus the ingredients of Indian cuisine enhanced the taste of the Indian food. Thus the remarkable platform was already set for the Akbar's successor, for the culinary culture to continue in India.

The seventeenth century starts with the death of Akbar and the Mughal throne went in three able successor's hands i.e, Jahangir (1605-27), Shahjahan (1628-58) and Aurangzeb (1659-1707). Under them also expansion took place but with low pace. (Linschoten, 1885; 118-119) Food doesnot have a single meaning, i.e., to feed someone or fulfil someone's appetite. In the Mughal period, the consumption of food had political attachment as well. The seventeenth century was the time when the social norms of society were taken into account. Interestingly one of the contemporary merchants in the Jahangir's period, Banarsidas writes that when he earned his first income, it was a moment of happiness and pride for his family. Moreover, it was celebrated in a huge manner by distributing sweets in the area by his grand mother. (Banarasi Das, 2005; 131)² In terms of hospitality in the Mughal times, Banarsidas himself writes that when he was running out of money one of the shopkeeper helped him by feeding the kachoori for free but later he paid him.³ Kachoori, a dish that is a kind of stuffed chapathi and oil fried, was used for several purposes in Agra in the seventeenth century. Indeed, a drink called Falooda, a favourite drink of Jahangir, was also a rich drink only consumed by a higher section of the society. The other sections of society could not afford this as it was a mixture of fruit juices, creams and jelly. (Achaya, 1998; 65) The dishes are laid out on a spotless dastarkhwan (tablecloth), even the condiments, the sliced mango, ginger and lime pickles, and bread brought in small sealed dishes. (Mukhoty, 2018; 144-145) Shah Jahan disliked eating in the presence of Europeans, who are considered filthy for not attending to this basic hygienic practice. Another item of food was *paan* or betel leaf for which one

of the English traveler Peter Mundy says that it had become a custom to provide betel leaf in every banquet without which the celebration would be incomplete and many great people in the empire ate it. (Mundy, 1914; 96-97) The importance of pan or betel leaf was also noticed by one of the Italian traveler Manucci during the Aurangzeb period as well and he had noticed that it was a common practice among the chief people of the empire to have betel leaf and also it was considered as a goodwill gesture to give betel leaf for the several guests who has visited them. No person refuses to have it as it would be considered as a bad manner. (Manucci, 1908; 63) This was also a period of the political strengthening, Emperor Jahangir in his time declared not to kill animals on Thursday and Sunday in remembrance of his late father. (Achaya, 1998; 161-162)

Despite the fact, he was very fond of chased meat. This period was also the time when cultural boundaries were not restricted to any place or region. For instance, one of the British ambassador to the court of Jahangir records that in his royal kitchen he had both Indian and English cook. (Achaya, 2004; 170-171) So the cultural boundary in this period was not confined to any place or region, it was multifaceted with so many culture intermingling with our existing culture. One can also understand that this was the time when alot of Europeans (the Dutch, French, Italian, and Britishers) were entering India, with an ambition for trade opportunities for their native nations which shows the political ability of the Mughal emperor. For instance, one of the contemporary traveler writes that at the time of Shah Jahan, European style pastries, cakes and other sweet dishes were prepared by some of the slaves who had been with the Portuguese at Ugulim. (Manrique, 1927; 218-219) Thus this lavishness and splendor indicate the elaborate system of food consumption that marks a legitimacy and power in the society.

The Dutch were active in the culinary practices and they introduced a varieties of dishes as well as salads. For instance, one of the contemporary traveler of seventeenth century Tavernier states that on his arrival in Hugli, he was welcomed with salads of several kinds, cabbages, asparagus, peas, and beans, which notes that the seeds of beans must have arrived from Japan. (Travenier, 2000; 113) One of the contemporary traveler Edward Terry also confirms that many people do not consume wine but they have other sorts of liquor which was healthier and was popularly called as Cohhaa (coffee) a black seed boiled in water which changed the taste of simple water (Terry, 1921; 300-301). The fresh fruits like apples, pears, grapes, and melons come from different parts of India like Samarkand, and

other countries like Bali, Bocara and Persia as these items were very much dear to the higher class of people. (Bernier, 1891; 249-250) The food consumption also incorporates several things especially in India, the concept of purity, vegetarian, non-vegetarian, and food taboo existed during earlier times as well.

Robert More, contemporary European writer, talks about the rice cultivation which was plentiful and very often sold on the spot, varieties of fruits, vegetables as well as spices were available and produced according to the wants. (More, 1861; 4-5) This was the time when Mughals were on the peak of their rule and the lavishness they enjoyed simply made them supreme in the eyes of a common man. Once on the death of a close noble, Umdatulmulk, the emperor Aurangzeb ordered that for three days one twenty dishes should be sent to the deceased family. (Khan, 1986; 63-64) The bakers of the Mughal period, especially during the Aurangzeb period, were numerous, though they were not capable of producing such fine bread. (Bernier, 1891; 255) Even for Aurangzeb, he says that although he was the person of simple tastes but more than thousands of rupees were used for the maintenance of the royal kitchen. (Ojha, 1975; 4-6) Thus in the period of Aurangzeb also we can notice that the prosperity and lavishness of various food and rich lifestyle of a higher class or royal class.

Tavernier, another contemporary traveler states that luxurious life style of the king was not over yet as the chalice from which he drinks was covered with gold and it was enriched with diamond, rubies and emerald. (Tavernier, 2000; 20-30) Thus in the period of Aurangzeb we notice the prosperity and lavishness of various foods and the rich life style of the higher class. The possession of variety of foods indicates a special place in the society. The show case of extravagances is also one way of projecting a special image in the society. The period of Aurangzeb also witnessed the quality and importance of good food. For instance in one of his letter to his son he writes that he still remembered the taste of good food of khichery and biryani. Even he was able to recall the cook's name Islam Khan who cooked 'kabuli' for him. Although he was getting old he says that the desire to eat good food has not left him completely though blackness has departed from his hair but not from his face. (Bilimoria, 2009; 12)

This formed the image of power and enormous wealth which they represent in the eyes of their subjects. The eighteenth century in the Indian history occupies a very ambiguous place. In the eighteenth century, the powerful Mughal Empire that was persistently built, started faltering and splitting up into fragments. The attitude

for the eighteenth century mostly is seen as a malign for Indian culture. Therefore the works which has been associated with the eighteenth century were looked down upon in the Indian history writing. Though the food consumption in the society didn't change with the political upheaval. This was the time when regional cuisine and poetry were taking pace and making tremendous change in the gastronomy of the people. Consumption of food and cuisine for rich people in the society remained the same in the eighteenth century. In this century, one of the contemporary writer Elizabeth Fay writes that there was a perception in England that the heat of the Bengal would destroy one's appetite. Interestingly, she observed just the opposite, people consume more food in India. (Fay, 1908; 140) Though eighteenth century was perhaps the most saddening phase for the Mughal India, it proves to be the most vibrant phase for the culture, food, and cuisine. There were so many contemporary authors and poets who have amplified the beauty of Indian cuisine through their writings. Interestingly the festive food also becomes popular among the Indian masses. One of the contemporary poet of the Eighteenth century Nazir Akbarabadi writes in one of the poetry for Diwali that it was the matter of happiness in the society. Someone took money, someone took debt, markets were filled with the toys and sweets (batashe), simultaneously the sweet makers used to call the customers in a attracting manner (Akbaradi, 2003; 92-94)⁴. Interestingly one can notice so many food items were part of the celebration like sweet, Barfi (one kind of sweet), Batashe (one sweet dish). On one hand this was the period of chaos in the political sphere and on the other hand cuisine was getting more spaces for joining the people. Food can be seen as a medium of bonding the people and now festive representation with the food becomes part of the Indian food culture. However, for Eid celebration he writes that from the early morning itself it was crowded for baths and sheer, sewaiya (festive food) were prepared with lots of joy. (Akbaradi, 2003; 82-84)⁵ Though mostly the poets uses so many hyperbole and filled it with imaginary things in their poetry to make their works beautiful. But here in his poem, one can also find out the true feelings of the Indian society. The dishes which were prepared for the Eid celebration was Sheer (a kind of sweet pudding), Sewaiyan (a popular sweet dish). Indeed here one can also notice that for some people, Sharab (wine) was not excluded from the celebration, it was part and partial of the celebration. Thus the regional cuisine also started a new phase in the social sphere. The society all together noticed a different gastronomic culture in India. In the eighteenth

century, while addressing her known person, Mrs. Elizabeth Fay in one letter states that the sugar and water were India's favourite beverage in the eighteenth century and this must be a mixture of sugar and water. Whereas in the form of butter, India had "ghee" with multiple uses. (Fay, 1908; 124-125) This was also the time when more importance was given to food, the chapatti made of wheat was not easily available to the masses. (Akbaradi, 2003; 168-170)⁶ Thus from this small couplet, one can understand the society was not so rich by that time.

The importance of wheat chapati shows the real picture of the eighteenth century. So all these items enhances the existing food culture of the eighteenth century. Despite the fact, that the central empire or the Mughal Empire collapsed in the eighteenth century. Interestingly, one of the contemporary writer Anand Ram Mukhlis writes that the imperial cooks (Khansamah) was not a common man in the Mughal court, as his income was equivalent to the deewan. (Mukhlis, 1946; 124) At a larger level the Mughals political structure received severe attacks at internal level and external as well, but at the economic level they were still continuing to mark their legitimacy on others. One part of the economy is also based on the trade that determines any nation's prosperity and cultural diversity. Interestingly this was the time when local fruits were becoming popular among the masses. For Mukhlis, mango (amba) of the Deccan was more preferred but the mangoes of Gujrat, Saharanpur, Malwa, Delhi and Muradabad were also famous. (Mukhlis, 1946; 121) Even Mohammad Shah sent Morabba of Mango (Mango Pudding) to the Nadir Shah of Iran through the subedar of Lahore. (Mukhlis, 1946; 121)

It is generally assumed that women's role is very minimal in Mughal empire. In this regard, one Insha, a contemporary poet of the Eighteenth century, wrote about womens' position in India. He states that women were given all kinds of medicinal food while at pregnancy mostly it was kadha and acchhiwani (health drink). (Badayuni, 1924; 46)⁷ Moreover these items of food were available only to the rich section of the society. It was not only one dish available before them, it was a mixture of varieties of food dishes. They were also open to have '*chillam*' a kind of intoxicant mixed with cardamom and cloves.⁸ In fact, one can also understand the economic condition of the eighteenth century, when the regional rulers started showing their wealth. For instance, Nawab of Awadh, Asafud Daulah was very much fond of luxury items, wines, bhang, andweed. (Hasan Mir, 2003; 37) Thus the economic background of

the eighteenth century for food was very much vibrant. Interestingly, at another instance in one of the *Malfuzat*, there was a discussion whether the food in the house of prostitute and those who do menial works can be considered edible. For which Abdul Shah Dehlavi states that, the income of both the person is haram or forbidden for use, so the items which are prepared from it are also haram or forbidden. (Dehlavi, 1896; 85) Along with food consumption, terms like purity and pollution began to matter in the eighteenth century.

Plight of Commoners; Food and Survival

The commoners in India have always struggled with deprivation on various fronts in their life. Food being an assimilation of so many cultures used for survival, growth, and development. Interestingly, the true face of the Mughal Empire was hidden behind the shimmering royal lifestyle, in reality for the majority of the people there was only poverty and pathetic condition of the poor people. Common people story has always been at the backdrop of the mainstream history. Recent trends in historical writings are centered around the life of the common people focusing on various dimensions such as socio-cultural, economic aspects. However, for the commoners there is hardly much work written on the food and food habits in the historical writings. As far as the history of the food culture of the Mughal is concerned, one gets the picture from the Emperors and the royalty who enjoyed delicious royal culinary items. So it would be interesting to examine the food culture of the commoners or ordinary subjects of the Mughal Empire. Indeed, sometimes social relations are defined and maintained through the food consumption. As Ross states that ‘variation in what people eat reflects substantive variation in status and power and characterizes societies that are internally stratified into the rich and poor, sick and healthy, developed and underdeveloped, over fed and under nourish’ (E. B. Ross, 1987; 7-55)

The condition of poor people can be understood when Babur in his memoir states that “peasants and people of low standing go about naked. They tie on a thing called *lunguta*, a decency-clout which hangs two spans below the navel. From the tie of this pendant decency clout, another clout is passed between the thighs and made fast behind. Women also tie on a cloth (*lung*), one-half of which goes round the waist, the other is thrown over the head”. (Babur, 1922; 519-521) The official gazetteer in Akbar’s period, *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abu Fazl also talks about the importance of food in human’s life by saying

that human being's survival and continuation of the life depends on five important pillars beginning with one which is father, second being mother, third children, fourth is servant and finally food. (Abu Fazl, 1873; 17-18) The last one is the most important among all or in other words it is the back bone for the rest four pillars of human life. The staple diet of the general masses in the morning was confined to jawar or bajra flour kneaded with brown sugar and water. (Chopra, 1976; 35-36) Here one can notice that unlike the royals the common masses did not have variation of food in their nature of consumption. Even the condition of the common people was much miserable and toilsome as one of the contemporary traveler John Linschoten notes that they consumed so little as it seems they survived by the air. Even the houses of the common people were very small in size without a window. (Eraly, 2006; 166-168)

In this regard, Moreland also mentions that the poor condition of ordinary man was extremely hopeless and pathetic in seventeenth century India. (Eraly, 2000; 519-520) Even Irfan Habib, argues that in the late seventeenth century there was agrarian crisis in the Mughal Empire. To confirm his argument he provides multiple reasons- a high revenue collection from the peasants, flight of the peasants from the land, negative impact on expansion of the peasants settlement, and peasants uprising and breakdown of the Jagirdar and Zamindars. (Alavi, 2002; 15-23) Although Abul Fazl states that poor and abstemious people eat sufficient quantity of food so as to keep up their strength required for the survival and to protect themselves from the influence of weather. (Abu fazl, 1873; 13-14) Thus it depicts true face of the commoners' food and their survival was confined with limited food as they were surviving for continuation of life.

The worse condition of the common masses made Akbar think in this direction. Subsequently, he started free eating houses to feed the poor section of the society. He opened three places for three different communities i.e. Muslims, Hindus and Jogis, known as Khairapurah, Dharmipurah and Jogipura respectively. (Abu fazl, 1873; 200-201) In the later period, Jahangir also ordered that in his hereditary dominions that include both the crown lands and Jagirs where free eating houses (*bulghur Khana*) were opened and provided with food for the poor according to their condition. (Jahangir, 1908; 74-76) These acts itself represents their survival was merely on the pity of the Emperor. Indeed, it was part of the ritual and considered as noble work for feeding the poor section of the society. Jahangir states that 'from the table of emperors comes relief to the beggars'. (Jahangir, 1999; 44) In this regard one of the prominent historian

Irfan Habib argues that common people during Mughal period ate inferior grains and hardly any meat. (Habib, 2008; 144-145) Though the arrivals of Europeans led to the introduction of several new food items which were not familiar to the common masses. The items like maize, potatoes, pineapples, chilies and several other items which were absent in their daily food. (Eraly, 2000; 115-117) Their social condition remained miserable as they had no option but to eat the same and insufficient food every day. Most of the foreign travelers of the contemporary period also confirm that the status of common masses was very pathetic. For instance, Sir Thomas Roe states that the common people in India live like fishes found in the ocean. He presented the picture of the Mughals in a hierarchical order where king resides on the top and peasants at the bottom. These were interlinked in a cyclic chain that starts with the farmer who robs peasants, the farmer gets robbed by a gentleman, and simply the greater robbed the lesser one and finally the king who robbed all people. (Achaya, 2004; 171-173) It is a fact that although in the Mughal times some of the richest persons of the world dwell in India so did the poor as well. (Eraly, 2006; 166-168) However, many foreign travelers regarded the country to be poor as common people in India were poor and pathetic in condition.

Jahangir in his memoir stated that, "I have myself weighed twice a year against gold, silver and other metals, all sorts of silks, textiles, and all sorts of grains and other things. I am weighed once at the beginning of the solar year and once at the beginning of the lunar year. The gold from these two weighings turn over to the treasurers to give to the poor and needy". (Jahangir, 1999; 62) These acts of giving alms in charity and helping the poor remained a special expression towards creating a separate identity in the eyes of masses. It also shows the common masses were always deprived of so many things and food is one among them.

Interestingly there was no gender segregation as such in the gastronomy of the common people as was seen in the royal life. As one of the travelers, De Leat confirms that the whole family eats together but their dishes would be confined to a single dish which was popularly known as *khichery*. (De leat, 2009; 89-90) He further talks about the ingredients in preparing *khichery* like peas, little rice, along with water which they eat hot generally in evening with butter. This reveals that unlike royal people's haute cuisine their cuisine was very simple and limited. Apart from these, they munch the same peas or other kinds of grains during the day time (Jahangir, 1999; 90) which they thought is enough for their lean stomach. (Palsaert,

60-64) Palsaert, notes that these people were of the belief that not possessing more things as they deserve only this. They took great refuge in religion and felt it was due to their karma that they were having this kind of a life. The government or the people who possessing power never took any initiatives to upgrade the life of the common people and they hardly know the taste of their meat as well. (Palsaert, 1925; 60-64) In this regard one of the interesting fact which generally is not given importance in the historical writing is the commoner's food and their life style. Generally discrimination in the society is understood on the basis of rank or economic status of one person, and surprisingly, here we have different classes on the basis of consumption. It was always left behind the shimmering life of the royal people. Their condition can also be seen as an epitome of the poverty and hunger-ness/ scarcity of food for the poor people in the Mughal era. Much has been written on the elite section of the society, although much less has been written on the cultural heritage of the common people.

Thus the lives of the common people can also be seen as the epitome of poverty in the Mughal era. Mostly all cultures represent different signs for prosperity and prestige, food is also one of the parameter used for defining the social strata of the society. Thus in the Mughal India it was the poor people whose social position was very weak with regards to their food consumption. For which Palsaert, one of the contemporary traveler says that the condition was so worse that in order to write about the common people of Mughal India he had to change fully the tune or style of his pen. He says that the royal people who dwell in rich palaces where all wealth stored were acutely accumulated from the sweat of the poor people. (Palsaert, 1925; 64-65) Even the species such as cardamoms and pepper were not accessible to the common people as they were expensive but for the sake of spices, probably they used cumin seed, coriander seed, and ginger. (Raychowdhuri, Habib, 2008; 461-462) This tells that their condition in the society was not only pathetic, but the quality of food they were eating was also poor and contributed in framing them as 'other' in the society. Ordinary people in Mughal India subsisted on rice, millet and pulses. Moreover, chillies were not commonly used in the cuisine, and they had just been introduced from South America by the Portuguese in the Mughal India. Indeed, the common Indian food was neither spicy nor haute, for pepper was grown only along the Western Ghats and most of the spices had to be imported from South-East Asia and was expensive. (Eraly, 1995; 630)

Bernier ascertains that *Kichery* remains as the chief food for the

ordinary people in the Aurangzeb period as well. Thus, the burden and pain of poverty which the common people took on their shoulders did not vanish even in the Aurangzeb period. (Eraly, 1995; 152) He was of the opinion that the proportion of the poor people in India were more, out of ten, seven or eight people were poor, ragged and miserable being. (Eraly, 1995; 282-283) The condition of the common people was so pathetic that it seems wheat was also not part of the common people diet despite having lots of produce in the region of Agra and Delhi. Indeed Edward Terry confirms it that the food of people was not made up of wheat flour but with some kind of coarser grain. (Terry, 1921; 297-300) The poor ate rice boiled with green ginger to which they added little pepper and butter. It was their principle dish but was seldom eaten. Water was probably common drink of the common masses but sometime it was converted into sherbet (sweet drink) with sugar and lemon. (Achaya, 2004; 173) The condition of the poor people remained the same, miserable and pathetic, to overcome such pains Aurangzeb also issued imperial *firman*s to add more *langarkhanas* in the city of Agra. He also tried to remove the pain of the needy and poor people in other parts of his territory by ordering those nobles who had up to a thousand *Zat* to open langars in their dominion. (Gupta, 1986; 56-57) Apart from these, one of the contemporary traveler Thevenot says that the common man in the society was living so miserable that in the name of medicine for flux they were having only rice along with milk. This was their medicine to cure themselves from a severe fever. (Thevenot, 1686; 108-109) He says that the Mughal army, especially cavalry and musketeers, were very much weak and cowardly that only a hundred Europeans might be well enough to beat the thousands. Their meal was kneaded with water and brown sugar. Whereas in the evening, they would consume Khichery, a mixture of rice, water, salt, grains, and some butter. As this food was the chief food for the soldiers and poor communities. (Thevenot, 1686; 123-125) These all reveals that the commoner's food remained static from the beginning till last with no other varieties available before them. For instance, even in Aurangzeb's period one traveler Manucci writes that the common people's dress is limited to the single cloth through which they can cover some parts of the body. (Eraly, 2000; 113-114) Even non vegetarian items like goats, sheep, and chicken were confined only to the nobility and the commoners hardly consume meat except on certain occasions like festivals or marriage. (Eraly, 2000; 114-116)

The situation even got worst in the eighteenth century for the common masses. In one of the official letters it is found that

there was a the custom of distributing the food in the majlis of Urs among the disabled, Fakirs, and darweshes who assembled in the majlis. The task of this having been done was also reported to the higher authority. (Balmukundnama, 1972;103-104) Indeed, Nazeer Akbarabadi through his Nazm or poetry depicted the poverty and misery of the poor people in the eighteenth century.⁹ The destruction of the Mughal empire in the eighteenth century impacted many businessman by loosing their job. This was the time when poverty was at its peak in Delhi and its nearby areas. Nazeer in one of his Nazm 'Shahar Aashoob' stated that it was the time of peace when the business were over.¹⁰ Indeed, the famous city in the Mughal times, Agra stopped generating any employment.¹¹ Thus one can understand that the situation of common masses became more deteriorated in the eighteenth century. Hence we can see the conditions of the common people, their food consumption during the Mughal times. It was just for the survival and their food was monotonous. It did not change much from the Babur period till the eighteenth century.

Conclusion

Hence the vibrancy of Mughal India is reflected in the food culture of the Mughal rule. As a matter of fact, food is generally treated as necessity for human being's survival but in the Mughal period we see the role of food in politics as it was used as a weapon of war, even with the passage of time the foodsystem elaborated the expansion of the empire and formation of the different social groups in the society on the basis of various types of food availability and consumption. The elite's table is always part of the machinery of the wealth and a showcased prosperity. This also increases the demand and subsequently the supply for food in the society. Food-sharing was always treated as an essential form of gift exchange, making society stronger. The Indian cuisine can be understood as a blend of multiple cultures and made available in a one platter. But it was not same for the commoners in Mughal India. No doubt at some places the free kitchens were opened to feed the common people. But these were hardly accessible to all or majority of the common people who lived in remote villages miles away from the cities. Thus the condition of the common people remained miserable throughout the Mughal period from Babur to the Aurangzeb. However the eighteenth century in India was one of the most chaotic period in the Indian history writing. This period attracted the attention

of many historians and scholars, who continue to debate on the factors for the decline of the mighty power and the nature of the eighteenth century. In this period, we see how regional cuisine gain its importance and the nature of the food also started matters for consumption.

Notes

1. Abraham Eraly, (1995), *The Last Spring The Lives and Times of The Great Mughals*, New Delhi: Penguin Books
2. 'Dadi baateinseerani, laadunuukatineet.
Pratham kamaiputra ki, sati a' autnimit'.
Banarasi Das, Half a Tale. *Ardha Kathanaka*, (trans., ed.,) Mukund Lath, Rupa and co, New Delhi, 2005, p. 131
3. 'Kabhuaawaheinhaatmeihe, Kaabhuderamaahi.
Daasanakaahusokaahae, karazkaachoorikaahi.
Kaahekaachoribaalnar, bees rupaiyakaahu.
Tumso koi nakaachukaahae, jaaheinbhaave the jaau'. Ibid., p. 193
4. "Kisinenaqadliyakisi ne udhar
Khilonekhelonbatashon ka garmhai bazar
Mithaiyon ki dukanenlagakehalwai
Pukartehai ki la laadivalihaiaai
Batashe le koi barfi kisi ne tolwai'.
Akbarabad Nazeer, *Kalam Nazeer Akbarabadi*, ed. Farooq Argali, Alhaj Md. Naseer khan, Fareed Interprises, Delhi, 2003, p. 92-94
5. "Phiclepahar se uthkenahane ki dhumhai
Sheer o shakkarsewaiyan banana kedhumhai
Koi to mast firtahaijaam e sharab se
Koi pukartahaichoteazab se'.
Ibid, p. 82-84
6. 'Ashrafon ne jo apni ye shaanebadhaihain
Sach puchiye to apni ye zatenchupayihai
Kahiyeunhe ki rotiyankiskis ne khayihai'.
Ibid, p.168-170
7. 'Zahar lagtihaimumjhkoacchhiwani (medicine for newly mom)
maipiungibula(son) janai ko
nahidetihaimujhkokadha kyu
du maikyakyabatajanai ko'.
Badayuni, Nizami,*DeewaneRangin Insha.*, Nizami Press, Badaui., 1924, p. 46
8. 'Mangauphulo ka gahnailaichiya aur laung
mangaugadgadikoribhi aur ek chillam'.
Ibid, p. 58.
9. 'Muflis ka dard koi dil me thaantanahi,
muflis ki bat ko koi manta nahi,
jathasb aur nasab ko koi jantanahi,
Surat bhiuski koi phechantanahi,
yahatakazar se uskogiratihaiMuflisi'.
Akbarabad Nazeer, *Kalam Nazeer Akbarabadi*, ed. Farooq Argali, Alhaj Md. Naseer khan, Fareed Interprises, Delhi, 2003, p. 19

10. '*Hai ab tohkuchsukhn ka mere karobar band
Rahtihaitabasoch me lailonihar band
Dariya sukhn ki fikr ka haimaujdar band
Ho kistarahnammuh me zaban bar bar band
Jab agrakekhalq ka ho rozgar band*'.
Muntakhab Nazeer, p. 9
11. '*Ab agre me jitney hai sab log haitabah
Aata nazzarkisikanahi ek dummibah
Mango azizoaise bure waqt se panah
Wo log ek kaudikemohtaj ab hai aah
Kasb-o-hunar key ad haijinkohazar band*'.
Ibid, p. 9

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