

A Comprehensive Study on the winter Delicacies of the Kashmir Valley

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Abstract:- The Valley of Kashmir is famous all over the world for its natural beauty, for its salubrious weather, and also for its rich and delectable cuisine. Due to its geographical location and the various dynasties and rulers - the Mughals, the Afghans, the Britishers, et al. - who reigned over it from time to time, the cuisine of this princely state is highly influenced by them. Though the cuisine is dominated by non-vegetarian food, there is also an abundance of vegetarian dishes which are consumed here. Since winters in Kashmir are quite harsh and the weather is not conducive, it takes a toll on the local produce. To offset the dearth of vegetables during winters, the locals resort to the use of dried vegetables and leafy greens (referred to as *hokh-syun*) – they are dried during summers and are stored for use during the cold weather.

This paper is an attempt to delve into the popular winter delicacies - which are gradually getting obsolete due to the invasion of fast foods and frozen foods - of the region. The methodology used is based on the author's personal experience, referencing books and gathering data from various blogs and websites.

Keywords:- Cuisine, Dried Vegetables, Hokh-Syun, Kashmir, Winter Delicacies

I. INTRODUCTION

During winters in Kashmir, vegetables, in their dried form, are the most sought-after commodity since ages. The locals start buying fresh produce (meant to be dried) during peak summer and early autumn, to gear up for the upcoming freezing cold. One can see garlands of colourful vegetables hanging from the attics of houses, and this is a visual delight in itself. These dried vegetables are also available in most parts of Srinagar, but, the best ones are picked up from the historic *Zaina Kadal* (*Kadal* is the Kashmiri word for 'bridge' – Srinagar city is located on the banks of River Jhelum with seven *kadals* or bridges connecting various parts of the city), a popular downtown area of the city. Many of these vegetables, which, once dehydrated, can be stored for months together and are sometimes, paired with lotus stems, lamb, chicken, wild duck, and pulses, and turn out to be real gastronomical delights.

II. OBJECTIVE

- To provide an insight into the forgotten dehydrated winter foods (*hokh-syun*) of the Kashmir Valley
- To create an awareness about the winter foods of Kashmir, which are dying a slow death
- To popularise the winter delicacies of Kashmir - which have taken a backseat after the invasion of western fast foods and frozen foods - among the present generation, in particular, and food researchers, bloggers, and the local populace, in general

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hokh-syun is the generic term for dried vegetables in Kashmir - *hokh* means 'dry', while *syun* refers to 'vegetable' or 'curry' in the Kashmiri language. The centuries-old tradition of using sun-dried cultivars of vegetables like aubergines, tomatoes, radishes, bottle gourds, pumpkins, turnips, dandelion greens, spinach, red chillies, quinces and even, sour apples, apricots and plums, during winters, is quite unique about the Valley. Many of these vegetables are complemented with lotus stems (called *nader* in the vernacular), which are abundantly available throughout the year, considering the presence of a large number of lakes, springs and other water bodies in the valley. Apart from having medicinal properties, the consumption of such foods also generates heat within the body - this is required to counter the chill of the wintry weather.

The following account describes at length the various *hokh-syun* delicacies, enjoyed by every household, during the winter months:

➤ *Al'e-hatche*

This refers to long strips or roundels of bottle-gourds, which are peeled, sliced, made into garlands, and sun-dried. This vegetable is generally paired with dried eggplants or tomatoes, lamb or fava beans (locally called as *bogl'e daal*, the word originating from *baghalee*, the Persian word for this variety of beans), which are considered to be a storehouse of proteins.

➤ *Waangan-hatche*

The thin and long variety of aubergines is used to make *waangan-hatche*. Each aubergine is sliced lengthwise into four sections in such a fashion so as to ensure that the green calyx holds the slices together. They are, then, hung

on a clothesline-like rope and allowed to dry in the sun. Usually cooked in a tamarind-based gravy and popular as *tsok-waangan-hatche*, they are also paired with *moong daal* (green gram).

➤ *Hochh Handh*

Wild dandelion greens are dried in the sun and preserved for use during winters. These greens are boiled, puréed, and flavoured with spices. They can be had on their own with rice or, are sometimes, cooked with fish or chicken. Owing to its high iron content, it builds one's immunity. It is ideal for new mothers and can also treat back-pain and chest infections.

➤ *Bummtsoonth*

This is the Kashmiri word for quince, the pear-shaped fruit, native to the Valley, which is cooked in its fresh as well as dried forms. During winters, sun-dried cubes of quince are combined with aubergines (and called *bummtsoonth waangan*) or mutton (and referred to as *bummtsoonth syun* or *bummtsoonth maaz*) and relished by one and all.

➤ *Gogje Aare*

Turnips are thickly sliced and made into garlands, which are then hung to be sun-dried. Like most dried vegetables, they are boiled and generally cooked with cottage cheese, fish, lamb or red kidney beans. Turnips are loaded with fibre and nutrients and are low in calories - hence, the perfect food for the sedentary lifestyle of Kashmiris during winters.

➤ *Waarimuth*

This black turtle bean delicacy is a must-have during winters in Kashmir. It is quite nutritious and its heat-generating properties make it one of the most sought-after dishes to beat the cold. *Waarimuth* can be had as a stew, or, can be combined with turnips to create a wonderful winter delicacy.

➤ *Tamatar or Ruwaangan-hatche*

Fresh tomatoes are sliced and spread out on sheets in the sun. Dried tomatoes are essentially used to flavour and colour other winter dishes. Commonly cooked with mutton or cottage cheese, they impart a distinct taste to the dishes. They are, sometimes, powdered and added to other dishes to enhance their flavours.

➤ *\Kangechh*

This wild, musky-flavoured mushroom, with its characteristic honeycomb appearance, is a prized delicacy, owing to its ethereal taste and exorbitant price. It possesses high antioxidant properties and is considered to be a therapeutic food. These morels are tossed gently with mild spices to retain their earthy aroma.

➤ *Bhoombh or Buem*

This winter dish of dried water lily rhizomes (locally called as *bhoombh* or *buem*) is best paired with dried fish and is a connoisseur's relish.

➤ *Hoggaade*

This delicacy is very commonly consumed during winters in Kashmir, and refers to dried fish. The word is a portmanteau from Kashmiri words, *hokh*, meaning 'dry' and *gaade*, meaning fish. Lean fish are gutted, cleaned and hung from strings to dry. Consuming *hoggaade* during winters is an age-old tradition in Kashmir. They are fried and cooked whole, with spices and dried tomatoes.

➤ *Pharre*

This smoked fish dish is also one of the very popular winter dishes in Kashmir. This dish is made from un-gutted fish, which are laid out on dry grass and the grass is set alight - this imparts a smoky flavour to it. The charred black skin is scraped off before the fish is cooked with tomatoes and local greens.

➤ *Guran*

This fingerling-based fish dish is also quite in demand during the winters and is cooked the way other fish dishes are. It is eaten whole (heads, fins, et al.).

➤ *Bote-tser Maaz*

This unique and delectable dish is made from lamb and dried apricots. It is one of the best meat recipes for the winter season, since dried apricots provide warmth to the body. Almonds, saffron, peppercorns and mint enhance the special flavour of this dish. The name of this dish comes from *bote-tser* and *maaz*, the Kashmiri words for dried apricots and meat, respectively.

➤ *Shabdeigh*

This is a very flavourful duck/mutton and turnip stew, mildly flavoured with saffron and almonds, cooked in a sealed earthenware vessel, simmered overnight over a low flame, and savoured the following morning. The name of this dish comes from the Urdu words, *shab*, meaning 'night', and *deigh*, meaning 'cooking pot'.

➤ *Harissa*

Greatly influenced by Central Asian cuisine, this breakfast winter dish also requires overnight cooking and is relished by the local populace of Kashmir with great gusto. This stew of meat and lentils is gently spiced with fennel, cardamom and other spices. It is traditionally had with local oven-baked flatbreads like *naan* or *kulcha*.

IV. CONCLUSION

The forgotten, mouth-watering winter recipes of Kashmir can only be revived with the concerted efforts of the tourism ministries at the Central and State levels – this will also give a fillip to domestic as well as international tourism; hotels and restaurants across the country can organise Kashmiri Food Festivals at regular intervals to popularise this cuisine. Food critics and bloggers can also play a major role in publicising these delectable and nutritious recipes.

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