

Food Habits of Indians in Khushwant Singh's Novel *Delhi*

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This article focuses on the food habits of various periods through different eye witnesses in Khushwant Singh's novel *Delhi*. Singh was born in Hadali in 1915, he wrote novels, short stories, and non-fictions. Singh was a fine historian, novelist, political commentator, an outstanding observer, and a social critic. He had a successful career as a writer. His profound knowledge and understanding of Indian history, political systems, and literary heritage were reflected in his prose works. Khushwant Singh's third novel *Delhi* is a mix of history, romance, and sex. It gives the history of the capital city of India, Delhi.

As an Indian writer he should prefer Indian food, but he likes Anglo Indian foods like ishtoo or sawset with kashtar for a putteen. When he tells about Hoity Toity, cousin of the Queen, guest of the president, a foreign lady, takes gins, and tonics and a plateful of tandoorichicken and Russian salad, at that time he prefers to eat chilled lager and some kababs. Singh wants to communicate with his cook bearer by lightening the candles on the dining table. One candle refers to no need of dinner, two candles for no need of bed tea in the morning.

Bhagmati, Singh's hijda whore wants to take lentil soup and a chappati. She wants to taste saffron pilaf, some oven baked chicken, and kulfi (ice-cream) from a hotel. Singh takes her to Moti Mahal and ordered a packed meal for two. Singh carries saffron pilaf and naan, chicken and baked fish and rabdee of thick clotted cream. Bhagmati says to Singh, "Will Huzoor kill me with hunger? Take me to a nice hotel and give me some saffron pilaf, some oven -baked chicken and kulfi (ice-cream) and I may tell you more" (37).

Ram Dulari, wife of Mussadi Lal, hits the hearth to warm up the morning food. She served the meal to her husband and she went back to the kitchen to eat hers. They take food in brass plates. Singh beautifully portrayed the traditional way of taking food by wives. When Singh told about Prophet Muse, he accepts a shepherd as his true servants because the shepherds liked to give goat milk to God. God replied to Muse that if you give food to somebody you can find me in them. Here Singh depicts true religious faith on God. The symbol of true religion is portrayed by Singh through Muse. When Singh talks about Bhagmati, he tells about how they have coffee. He mixes a cup of coffee with rum. Bhagmati does not notice the smell of rum and

difference in taste. “By the time she has drained the mug she is as warm inside as she is toasted on the outside.” (104).

When Singh talks about Georgine, she wants to taste a carton of milk of cock. She drank two bottles of cock, after drinking she felt good. By seeing this Singh ordered to cook for her the next time. When he talks about untouchables, the poorest of poor, Jaita Rangretra, narrates the story of Badshah. When Badshah Jahangir’s death was heard in Delhi, no poor was allowed to light a lamp or kindle a fire in their hearth for some days. Badsha was a drunkard. He drank more wine than uncle Raloo who was drunk most of the time. Badshah could drink twenty cups of arrack and eat tolas of opium every day. The Queen put some magic powder in his cup of wine and made him fall madly in love with her. As a poor, Jaita and his uncle Raloo drank lots of sherbet which was served free outside the nawabs’ mansion, they ate lots of sweet meats which was given free by rich men. Sometimes the sweepers were provided with an extra large portion of the left overs. Begum Zeenat Begum made the arrangements to Bahadur Shah Zafar.

We quoted Saadi: I am hungry and opposite hungry and opposite to a table of foods; I am a lusty youth at the door of a hamaam full of females.’ This brought the colour of pomegranates to her check.

We notice that Zeenat Mahal had prepared our favorite dishes: vension kababa with nauratan chutney made of nine condiments; roast wings of peacocks and quails; kulfi covered with gold leaf and garnished with slices of mango. She helped us wash our hands. She picked the food with her own fingers and placed it in our mouth. We could not recall when last, she had shown such tenderness towards us. When the meal was finished, she rolled a betel-leaf, mixing lime and catechu paste with scented tobacco, and placed it in our mouth (263).

In the chapter Meer Taqi Meer, he tells that it was the first time in his life that besides sherbet, wine was served at a Mushaira. He has tasted wine made from Kandahar grapes chilled in snow brought down from the Himalayas. He always drank wine. He becomes a drunkard because of the Kandahar grapes. The people who lived in this period used to take maghaee leaves like our betel leaves. In the fifteenth chapter, Singh listed out his favorite foods: raw onion, mangoes, cheekoos, ice-creams, cakes, rice, lentils, potatoes, and fried foods. He used to take black coffee and vitamin B complex tablets too.

When he talks about farting, he tells the reason for farting. Some people did not take fleshy fruits and no fibrous vegetables. Poultry, fish, and meat are some foods which produce farts. Vegetables like potatoes, radishes, carrots, garlicks, onions, cabbages, turnips, and cauliflowers are some fart producing items listed by Singh. Another type of fart is called the scrapers which are a product of eating too much tamasick food. Raja’s food does not produce much wind. If they eat highly spiced tamasick foods, they become the world champion farters.

In the sixteenth chapter, Alice Aldwell, Singh gives the importance of mangoes. Begum Zeenat Mahal gives a trayload of watermelons and mangoes as a gift to Alice. These mangoes were taken from the Talkatora estate. He also describes the mango season. He tells that the best time to enjoy mangoes is between mid mornings and afternoons. After their meal they wanted to taste mangoes. Then they also wanted to taste the ice cooled leaves with saffron. Alice told about the coarse chapattis and meat curries. Singh gave his view on mangoes as such that the Alfonsa are the most delicious mangoes from TamilNadu.

Singh tells about Bahadur Shah Zafar’s favorite dishes – kabas with Nauratanchutney. After the meal they take betel leaf, mixing lime, and catechu paste with scented tobacco. He tells that mangoes are incomparable fruit. Nearly a thousand varieties of mangoes are available there, but very tasty are Dussehris, Landas, Ratan’s farm orchard of Uttar Pradesh. These mangoes were also Bhagmati’s favorite. During the mango season her visits were more frequent. She tells that these mangoes are good for digestion and are the best thing to take for constipation.

The traditional way of Indian food habits was portrayed by Singh. As a whore Bhagmati takes her coffee with rum. Whenever she feels hungry, she wants to taste coffee or rum whereas Georgine wants to taste coke. Through Ram Dulari Singh gives the picture of Indian food habits. She always takes food after her husband takes his. In olden days people used brass plates for taking food. Likewise Ram Dulari and her husband take food in brass plates. After taking meal the Hindus use betel leaf for digestion. In many places Singh talks about the usage of betel leaf.

Even today we give the leftover foods to poor. In the chapter Jaita Rangretra, Singh shows the difference between rich and poor by giving the leftovers. Fart producing foods are also rightly described by Singh. Various tastes of mangoes were appropriately differentiated by Singh. Not only as a historian, but also as a good humanitarian Singh points out the food habits of an Indian in an interesting manner.

Work Cited

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