

THE ESSENCE OF FOOD DURING FESTIVALS – A STUDY OF EID-UL-FITR

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Abstract

Culture can be defined as the multiple attributes that one can associate with a particular ethnic cluster or community. It is also the knowledge that the group has cultivated over many generations and long periods of time. Culture is not limited to attire, celebration of festivals, food, art, fashion, crafts or language but is an interaction of all these components across expanses. It is this diversity that gives rise to evident variances between cultures, yet, there are commonalities that one encounters. There appears to be an invisible link between individuals and culture. Food as an aspect is a manifestation of the link. Food becomes a culmination of all factors related to culture in addition to geographical factors. The preparation of certain dishes on certain festivals is also a depiction of how culture can be practiced. This paper attempts to examine the relationship of food with culture and how everyday culture has evolved over time.

Keywords: Food, Festivals, Culture, Community, Eid-Ul-Fitr.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is an amalgamation of shared beliefs, arts, attitudes, values, and socially transmitted behavioural patterns of a group or organization. India is a multicultural country. There are different kinds of food habits, religions, customs, traditions that are followed. In everyday life, we practice a multitude of culture like language, art, lifestyle, fashion, craft, food, festivals and even holidays. Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people. If we compare one culture with the other, it would be certainly varying in attires, festivals, food, beliefs and so on. Food and festivals are the products of culture. Food as a manifestation of culture varies according to the faith and geographic location one places him/her in. Festivals as a result also diverge according to religion and belief system. Food and festival are definitely linked to each and other and as a result each festival has designated signature dishes prepared depending on the religion and location of the participants.

HISTORY, SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF EID UL-FITR

Eid ul-Fitr is a joyous three-day celebration that marks the end of *Ramadan*, the Muslim holy month of fasting. *Eid* falls on the first day of the 10th month of the Islamic calendar. The celebration begins on the sighting of the new moon. Every year, *Eid ul-Fitr* is held about 10 days earlier than the previous year. *Zakat Al Fitr* is the type of alms given by Muslim families to the poor in the form of sustenance such as rice and barley. On the first morning of *Eid*, Muslims perform the *Eid* prayer where they thank *Allah* for enabling them to complete *Ramadan*. During *Ramadan* the prophet Muhammad (swa) had won two battles. One was the battle of Badr and other was the conquest of Mecca. It is believed that war as fasting during *Ramadan* and *eid* as victory. Muslims are restricted in their diet, and prohibited foods like pork products, blood,

carrion, and alcohol are included. Food permissible for Muslims is known as halal food, they always take *Halal* meat which is slaughtered by the name of Allah and they do not accept any non-halal meat from non-Muslims without fish and vegetables.

In India, more that 20,000 worshippers gather near the famous mosque the Jama masjid in Delhi, to offer the prayer. After the prayer there will be the Takbeer(call) Allahu Akbar (God is the greatest). Later on they visits to the graves of ancestors and to their family and friends to give sweets and gifts, they offer money to the younger ones. Traditional Eid delicacies are served. In Delhi, the lanes of Chandni Chowk, in Mumbai Mohammad Ali road and in Srinagar Hazratbal mosque are filled with people dressed in colourful clothes. The traditional food of Eid in India is Gulabjamun, Sheer khurma, Faluda, Rice pudding and Biryani.

In UAE, the celebrations are the same but they use to prefer traveling around the city or out of the country. There will be a week of public holidays for the government and non-government employees so that they can spend precious time with their families. The highlights of Eid ul-fitr in UAE is fireworks display which gives the pleasure to everyone's eyes. The traditional food of UAE is Biryani, Laasida, Tagine, Bolani, Sheer khurma, to name few.

In Turkey, during the Eid holidays people visit the beach to take the advantages of fishing, swimming and enjoy time with their families in a long weekend.

In Singapore, one of the highlights of the Eid al-Fitr celebrations is the explosion of colours lighting up the Geylang Serai area. 50 different kinds of lights are lit and it is the centre of celebration of Eid ul-fitr. The bazaar of delicious food is also laid for people's consumption.

In Iceland, as the population of Muslims is very less they all gather in the capital of Iceland, Reykjavik to celebrate Eid ul-fitr and they bring the delicacies from Indonesia, Egypt.

In Egypt, people visit parks and zoos to spend quality time with their families. Giza zoo is the famous location to visit during Eid ul-fitr.

In New Zealand, after the prayer people visit to the Eden Park, which will be filled with activities for all visitors and varieties of food from around the region is also made available.

Although there are many countries, celebrating the same festival worldwide celebrations will be different.

The history of Biryani: The word Biryani is derived from the Persian word *Biryan*, which means 'fried before cooking' and *Birinj*, the Persian word for rice. Many historians believe that biryani originated from Persia and was brought to India by the Mughals. Biryani was further developed in the Mughal royal kitchen. There is a story of Mumtaz Mahal, wife of Shah Jahan, once visited the barracks and saw the soldiers undernourished. So she talked to the chef to cook rice and meat with the spices. There is also another tale that the Turk- Mongol Taimur had introduced biriyani to India in the year 1398 and even the Nizam's of Hyderabad and Nawabs of Lucknow did so. It is very famous in Hyderabad. In the beginning it was prepared with children or meat but now there are many varieties of Biryani including vegetable biriyani, egg biriyani, prawns biriyani, kofta biriyani and fish biriyani even different ways of cooking same biriyani.

History of Haleem: Haleem is the popular dish in Hyderabad India. It is an Arabic dish which had been introduced by the Chaush people during the period of Nizam's . Chaush are the people from Yemen, who were brought to Hyderabad as labourers. The famous Haleem in Hyderabad is different from the original Arabian dish. It is famous during Ramadan and in Arab countries it is prepared on the special occasion like Eid ul-fitr. Haleem is called as harees in Arab countries.

The difference between harees and haleem is just a use of spices but both are made of meat and wheat.

Sheer khurma is a traditional breakfast festive dish of Muslims. It is probably prepared during the Eid ul-fitr and Eid uladha. Sheer khurma originated from Persia.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Albala(2011), states that going out for Ethiopian, Argentine, or Malaysian food—or some other international cuisine—may be all the rage these days, but understanding the world’s food cultures goes far beyond sampling the fare of the latest” exotic” restaurant.
2. Sumai et al (2019), conclude that zakat is one possible route to reduce poverty and strengthen households among the poor communities of Indonesia.
3. Ahmed (2009), remarks that the main reason for happiness is the promise of reward and forgiveness from Allah after the hard work in the fasting month. Muslims fast by the day and stand for long prayer during the night for the pleasure of Allah. Eid day is the pay day for that hard work.

METHODOLOGY

The method adopted for gathering the data necessary for analysis was Secondary qualitative assessment. Numerous Ethnographic studies that were available on several forums were consulted before selecting those which best suited the objectives of the paper. In the thematic analysis of the secondary data gathered from different sources available on the internet food, culture , festivals and the resultant practices were examined and a comparison of the different ways of celebrating the same festival in different locations across borders was examined. On the basis of this thematic analysis, the following observations were made .

DATA ANALYSIS

To commemorate the conclusion of this period of fasting, an elaborate range of dishes like *mutton korma*, *Biryani*, *Haleem*, *Phirni*, *Sheermal*, *Sheer khurma*, *Kimami sewaiyan* and many more are prepared. There are also other famous dishes in Arab countries like *kunafa*, *Lugaimat* , *umm ali* , *Halawat el jibn* which are prepared on the occasion of *Eid*. Despite the beliefs and practices being similar for many, the food and the celebration of festivals are different.

Let us examine the origins and specialties of certain dishes prepared during *Eid Ul-Fitr*. One such popular dish is *sheer khurma*. It originated in Bangladesh and is also known as *semai*. The dish may have been originally made in Bangladesh, but during *Eid ul-fitr* it is prepared worldwide. This sweet vermicelli dessert is an *Eid* favourite in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Biryani is another famous dish during *Eid*. There are various theories related to the origin of this scrumptious dish. Many historians believe that biryani originated from Persia and was brought to India by the Mughals. Biryani was further developed in the Mughal royal kitchen.

There are many legends associated with the evolution of Biryani. Perhaps the dishes cooked during *Eid ul-fitr* may seem similar but the use of the ingredients is undeniably different. In India, they use the meat of chicken or beef or mutton but in the Arab countries they use the meat of camel and even the milk of camel, because these ingredients are locally and easily available.

Hyderabadi Haleem is a type of *Haleem* popular in the Indian city of Hyderabad. Haleem is a stew composed of meat, lentils and pounded wheat, made into a thick paste. It is originally an Arabic

dish and was introduced to the Hyderabad State by the *Chaush* people during the rule of the Nizams (the former rulers of Hyderabad State). Local traditional spices helped a unique Hyderabad Haleem evolve, which became popular among the native Hyderabadis by the 19th century. *Haleem* is a famous dish during *Ramadan* and *Eid ul-fitr* in all over the world.

CONCLUSION

In *Eid ul-fitr* the practice of *zakat ul-fitr* which is giving food, money and clothes to the needy people a day before of *Eid ul-fitr* is dutifully followed. During the raging pandemic, none of the festivals were celebrated properly, but the culture and the beliefs were adhered to by the faithful. Different cultural attributes promote diverse cultural beliefs, traditions, customs, food habits and clothing but there is a religion called “humanity” which combines everyone without any separations. The resultant diversity in food habits and therefore cultural practices reiterates that indigenous resources and local practices play an extremely significant role in deciding the manifestations of culture.

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