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KASHMIRI CUISINE - AN INTERCULTURAL MANAGEMENT-BASED APPROACH ANALYSIS BASED ON INDIAN VALUES AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS

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ABSTRACT:

THIS PAPER EXAMINES THE COMPLEXITIES OF KASHMIRI CUISINE, EMPHASIZING ITS LEGACY OF FLAVOURS AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS FROM A MANAGEMENT-BASED POINT OF VIEW. FROM THE FRAGRANT AND DECADENT WAZWAN, A GRAND FEAST THAT DISPLAYS THE OPULENCE OF KASHMIRI HOSPITALITY, TO THE EVERYDAY TREATS LIKE ROGAN JOSH AND DUM ALOO, KASHMIRI CUISINE COMBINES PERSIAN, CENTRAL ASIAN, AND INDIGENOUS FLAVOURS TO CREATE A UNIQUE CULINARY IDENTITY. KASHMIRI CUISINE IS A TESTAMENT TO THE REGION'S RICH CULTURAL HISTORY AND DIVERSE INFLUENCES. IN ADDITION TO ENHANCING THE FLAVOUR DEPTH, THE USE OF HIGH-QUALITY INGREDIENTS LIKE SAFFRON, DRIED FRUITS, AND YOGURT ALSO REPRESENTS THE REGION'S CULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO ITS PAST AND ENVIRONMENT. THE PAPER ALSO EMPHASIZES KASHMIRI TEA CULTURE, WHERE BEVERAGES LIKE KAHWA AND NOON CHAI ARE VALUED DURING SOCIAL AND FAMILY EVENTS. BY LOOKING AT THESE COMPONENTS, THIS PAPER HOPES TO HONOR KASHMIRI FOOD AS A LASTING TRADITION THAT TIES THE AREA'S PAST AND PRESENT TOGETHER WHILE STILL HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD'S CULINARY SCENE.

KEY WORDS: KASHMIRI CUISINE, WAZWAN, CULTURAL HERITAGE, PERSIAN INFLUENCE, CENTRAL ASIAN FLAVOURS, INDIGENOUS COOKING, SAFFRON

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INTRODUCTION

According to [1], the Vale of Kashmir, located in the Himalayan region, is known for its natural beauty and cultural heritage. The culture of Kashmir valley in India is a diverse blend of ethnic groups and social entities, influenced by various civilizations over time [2]. According to [3], Kashmir shares cultural connections with China, Tibet, Central Asian cities, Afghanistan, and Iran today. Since the 19th century, people have defined culture as the common characteristics of daily life among members of a racial, religious, or social group, including customs, social forms, and material characteristics [4]. Human biology has important sociocultural values, and ethnic diets have developed within human civilization [5]. Diverse ethnicities in India have evolved distinctive eating habits. Idli, samabar, and dosa are popular dishes in southern India, while Punjabis are renowned for Paharata and Biharis for Littichoka [6]. Kashmir is distinguished by its distinct cuisines, languages, attire, festivals, customs, rituals, and communities. Food becomes a key identification marker as a blatant manifestation of cultural values, identifying socioeconomic status, personality, habits, and ties from family to community to ethnic groups or nationality, all of which vary over time and space [7]. According to [8], some foods are highly valued, some are saved for religious feasts, and yet others serve as indicators of social standing. Every part of a human being is influenced by food. "Food not only nourishes but also signifies," according to sociologist Claude Fischler [9]. In Kashmir different ethnic communities (Kashmiri, Pahari, and Gujjar) are unique in their cultural expressions [10]. All these communities use different plants and animals for their cultural food dishes. Rice, the staple food in Kashmir, used from ancient times [11], and is used in almost all communities, and in Kashmiri known as "Baath". Some famous local dishes include Haakh, Razma-daal which are obtained from collard green and beans respectively. Locals believe that food should have a pleasing aroma, taste, and appearance [12]. The success of a meal depends on its appeal to the sight, nose, and tongue. In Kashmir, cultural events such as marriages, parties, and festivals (Eid, Eid-e-milad, Holi, Diwali) are celebrated with a diverse range of dishes. Along with the many cuisine courses, there are a few other dishes served at funerals. Kashmiri cuisine, particularly 'wazwaan' dishes, relies heavily on spices and condiments known as 'Masaale' [13]. People in the valley have different views on ethno-food, with some referring to it as a heritage, others claiming it is reserved for the elite, and yet others viewing it as a needless progression of traditional meals. Kashmir's customs surrounding food are intricately linked to seasonality, religion, and ceremonies [14]. Wazwan, a regal multi-course feast served at weddings and other significant events, is an essential part of Kashmiri Muslim tradition. Mutton is the main ingredient in up to 36 meals, which also include specialties like Rista (meatballs in crimson sauce), Rogan Josh, Daniwal Korma, and Gushtaba (Bali, Singh, Kachroo, et al., n.d.). Kashmiri Pandit cuisine, on the other hand, stays away from garlic and onions in favor of yogurt-based gravies and mild spices like turmeric and asafoetida [15]. The recipes are made richer and more authentically local by using saffron and dried fruits, which are farmed nearby in the Pampore region [16,37]. Kashmiri food is about identity, hospitality (mehmaan nawaazi), and seasonal adaptation in addition to flavors. Due to harsh winters, people have long dried vegetables (HokhSyun), including tomatoes, turnips, brinjals, and haak, to ensure food security during times when fresh product is in short supply [17]. Sun-dried meats, fermented pickles, and smoked fish (PhariGaad) are examples of sustainable food preservation techniques and ecological adaptability that are ingrained in the cultural psyche [18]. Crucially, during religious and cultural occasions in Kashmir, food is used as a symbolic expression. For example, at festivals and social events, people eat foods like ModurPulav (sweet saffron rice), Sheer Chai (salted pink tea), and Noon Chai (made with milk and baking soda). Every dish has emotional and cultural meaning, frequently commemorating

life events such as marriage, childbirth, and funeral customs [19]. Additionally, the richness of plants and animals is essential to the food chain in the area. A long-standing symbiotic relationship between humans and nature is seen in the traditional use of domesticated animals, freshwater fish from rivers like the Jhelum, and locally foraged plants like Nunar, Sochal, Handh, and mushrooms [16]. The transfer of this intangible cultural heritage is seriously threatened by the growing disconnection of younger generations from traditional culinary traditions brought about by urbanization, globalization, and shifting lifestyles [20]. Kashmiri food is a vivid representation of the history, topography, and cosmopolitan culture of the area. It is a living legacy that needs to be conserved via intergenerational communication, education, and documentation. Sustaining regional culinary identities, such as Kashmir's, is crucial to sustaining ecological resilience and cultural continuity as food systems change throughout the world [5].

KASHMIRI PANDIT AND MUSLIM FOOD TRADITIONS: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

As two crucial communities Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims have coexisted for generations, each establishing unique culinary traditions influenced by their respective religious beliefs, rituals, and natural surroundings, Kashmiri cuisine represents the region's rich cultural heterogeneity [21,36]. Although the two civilizations use many of the same products and cooking methods, there are also substantial variations between their culinary ideas, particularly if it addresses rules of nutrition and the symbolic implications of food [14].

Kashmiri Pandit Cuisine, being deeply rooted in ancient Vedic traditions, reflects a sacred relationship between food and spirituality. Traditionally, Kashmiri Pandits refrain from the use of onions, garlic, and tomatoes in their cooking, especially in ceremonial dishes. Instead, they rely heavily on yogurt, asafoetida (*hing*), and turmeric to enhance flavor [22]. Their cuisine emphasizes purity and ritualistic significance. Dishes like *Dum Aloo*, *Nadar Yakhni*, *RuwanganChaman* (paneer in tomato-based gravy), and *MooliTsaman* (radish with paneer) are often prepared during religious festivities. The meat consumed by Kashmiri Pandits, especially mutton, is always prepared with specific rituals, and they avoid halal meat, aligning with their *shuddh* (pure) meat practices [23].

Kashmiri Muslim cuisine However, the indigenous customs and influences from Central Asia, Persia, and Afghanistan that were introduced to the area by Muslim kings and travelers have been combined to create Kashmiri Muslim cuisine [24]. The *Wazwan*, a spectacular multi-course feast that is both a culinary masterpiece and a cultural statement, is the classic Muslim Kashmiri meal. In Muslim homes, staple foods like rogan josh, yakhni, gushtaba, rista, and tabakmaaz are frequently served, particularly during weddings along with significant festivals like Eid [25]. Kashmiri Muslims, in contrast to their Pandit counterparts, often employ onions, garlic, and a broader variety of spices, such as cloves, cardamom, and cinnamon. The emphasis is on slow-cooked, meat-heavy gravies flavored with saffron and aromatic herbs, and the cooking medium is frequently mustard oil or ghee [26]. There are a number of points of convergence despite the disparities. The consumption of fennel, dry ginger, ver masala (a special blend of Kashmiri spices), saffron (*kong*), and the seasonal availability of ingredients are taken seriously by both indigenous groups. Both ethnic groups eat rice as a primary diet, and although there are slight preparation differences, foods such *ChokWangun* (sour brinjal), *Rajma*, and *Haak* (collard greens) are present in both cuisines [27]. In these communities, preparing and sharing meals has social and spiritual significance. Pandits maintain a more individualized and ritual-centric approach, frequently offering cooked food to deities before to consumption, whilst Kashmiri Muslims prioritize communal feasting through

the Trami system in Wazwan [28, 29]. These distinctions show how religion and culture have influenced Kashmiri food consumption not just in regard to ingredients but also in terms of culture. Culinary borders are becoming increasingly blurred in today's world [2]. Urbanization and social intermingling have resulted in hybrid meals and culinary practices. However, fundamental differences in cooking methods, product selection, and cultural symbolism keep both dishes unique [30]. The comparative study of various food traditions not only reveals Kashmir's cultural richness, but it also emphasizes food's importance as a medium for identity, memory, and continuity [3].

WAZWAN: THE HEART OF KASHMIRI MUSLIM FEASTING

Structure and Significance of the Wazwan

Wazwan, the pinnacle of Kashmiri Muslim culinary art, is more than a feast; it is a revered and intricate social rite representing hospitality, cultural pride, and communal harmony. Wazwan is deeply ingrained in the region's socio-cultural fabric, and it is especially made for important occasions like weddings, festivals, and state banquets. It normally consists of up to 36 precisely prepared courses, with a focus on mutton-based foods, though the number might vary depending on the event and the family's economic situation [25], [26]. Wazwan's significance stems not only from its rich and aromatic foods, but also from the religious ceremonies and social experience it promotes. The meal is customarily served on a huge copper plate known as a trami, which is shared by four guests seated on the floor. This sharing practice demonstrates the Kashmiri great of mehmaan nawaazi (hospitality) and equality, as everyone, regardless of status, eats the same dish [30]. The Waza, or master chef, is at the center of this custom; their position is highly esteemed and inherited. A member of a specialized community that has been trained over many generations, the Waza oversees a group of helpers (wazas or nauf) and plans the cooking process, typically in an outdoor kitchen (Vur). To create the distinctive texture and flavor that characterize Wazwan, cooking is done with traditional tools and techniques, such as boiling food over wood fires for the entire night [26]. As a cultural steward of traditional recipes and cooking secrets that are primarily passed down orally and infrequently documented, the Waza's duty is not just technical but also symbolic [31]. To ensure consistency and cultural authenticity, the kitchen's hierarchical system is rigorously upheld, and the lead Waza has the final say over the menu and seasoning. Wazwan has maintained its cultural sanctity in spite of modernization and shifting eating habits; although restaurants and caterers now serve miniature versions of Wazwan for regular consumption, the ceremonial version made by traditional Wazas is still indispensable for weddings and other cultural ceremonies. Keeping this tradition is crucial for maintaining Waza livelihoods and fostering culinary heritage tourism, in additionally keeping cultural identity [30].

ROLE OF FOOD IN RITUALS, HOSPITALITY, AND COMMUNITY BONDING

Gender Roles in Food Preparation and Transmission of Knowledge

Beyond its primary purpose of providing nourishment, food plays a significant role in the formation and manifestation of social identity, ceremonial significance, and collective values in Kashmiri society. In addition to serving as indicators of cultural uniqueness, the region's culinary customs serve as social scripts that enable communities to perform and reinforce their customs, social structures, and collective memory [28,29].

Role of Food in Rituals, Hospitality, and Community Bonding

Without food, Kashmiri rituals—whether religious, seasonal, or life-cycle events like marriages, burials, or births—cannot be fully performed. Pandits celebrate festivals like Herath (Shivratri) with lavish vegetarian feasts that include dishes like Dum Aloo, ChokWangun, and Nadur Yakhni, while Kashmiri Muslims prepare special dishes like Phirni, Harissa, and Shufta during Ramadan (Ramadan) and Eid [32,33]. Both communities hold hospitality, or mehmannawaazi, in high regard as a cultural value. In addition to being a kind gesture, serving guests a full meal like Wazwan or Kehwa (a traditional saffron green tea) with dry fruits is a means of maintaining honor, demonstrating social standing, and fortifying familial bonds [34]. During Wazwan ceremonies, sharing meals from a Trami (community plate) promotes intimacy, egalitarianism, and a sense of shared identity among diners [35]. Furthermore, food is a means of passing down cultural values from one generation to the next. In addition to ingredients and techniques, recipes that have been passed down orally through the centuries serve as cultural archives, preserving memories, stories, and symbols connected to ancestors' ways of life [27]. By strengthening communal connection and bridging the past and present, these culinary customs serve as social connectors.

Gender Roles in Food Preparation and Transmission of Knowledge

In Kashmiri food systems, gender is crucial. High-profile ceremonial cooking, particularly the preparation of Wazwan, is a male-dominated field headed by the Waza, while women have historically been the main keepers of household cooking and food knowledge, handling ingredients, preserving seasonal foods, and preparing daily meals [25,30].

CONCLUSION

With its complex flavor layers and cultural meaning, Kashmiri food is much more than just a compilation of local recipes; it is a deep reflection of the social structure, environment, and history of the valley. We discover the history of centuries-old exchanges between native Kashmiri customs and outside influences from Indian, Persian, and Central Asian civilizations by investigating this cuisine. The intricate multi-course Wazwan, which is both a culinary wonder and a cultural custom that perfectly embodies Kashmiri hospitality and communal identity, is a prime example of this mix. The paper emphasizes how commonplace foods like rogan josh, dum aloo, and yakhni are influenced by geography, seasonality, and socioreligious customs while also carrying cultural histories. A strong link to the area's agroecological resources and trading history is demonstrated by the use of ingredients like saffron, dried fruits, and fermented dairy products. In the meantime, the tea culture—emphasized by the ceremonial drinking of Kahwa and Noon Chai—further illustrates the importance of food and drink in familial customs, social connection, and caregiving. By documenting and analyzing these culinary components, this paper brings to light the lasting nature of Kashmiri food culture and its propensity to evolve while keeping authenticity. In an era of fast globalization and culinary uniformity, preserving traditional gastronomic expertise is critical. It not only functions as a cultural hub for the town, but it also makes a significant, unique addition to the global culinary scene. Thus, the paper validates Kashmiri cuisine as a living tradition—one that connects the past to the present, brings people together, and continues to build identities via the universal language of food.

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