



Consumers perception towards Kashmiri cuisine: Wazwan

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Abstract

Kashmir not only is known for its scenic beauty, but also for its cultural richness and cuisine. The Kashmiri cuisine usually known as *Wazwan* is a craftsmanship of Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims holds an important place in the world. *Wazwan* is a multi-course meal in Kashmiri cuisine that is being one of the unavoidable components of a Kashmiri wedding and is very popular because of the appealing flavor, texture, and palatability characteristics. *Wazwan* is a very elaborate preparation of seven (07) to thirty-six (36) dishes that are mainly made up of mutton, chicken, fruits and vegetables and has merged items from many cultures like India, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, etc, from time to time. The preparation and presentation of *Wazwan* is considered as an art, and the practicing possessor of this art is known as "waza" (chef) and does not follow any fixed Standard operating procedure (SOP) nor is it done in an organized quality regulated sector. *Wazwan* is based on the gregarious use of Kashmiri red chili powder, turmeric and saunf. The recipes extract their wondrous aroma from green and black cardamom, cinnamon and clove and Kashmiri zeera or shah zeera straight from the Valley that lends these dishes a divine Roganjosh, Nate-yakhni, Rista and Goshtaba. Though, traditional knowledge of these cultural meat products is not carefully documented, on the other hand demand for these tradition meat products is ever-growing because of speedy urbanization and industrialization. Thus, researchers need to focus on their popularity and considerable efforts must be made to meet such increasing necessities as there is a vast potential to introduce them at the national level and encourage their export.

Keywords: regional food, wazwan, Kashmiri culture

Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Paradise on Earth is also well known for its hospitality. *Wazwan* being the most formal meal of Kashmir takes hours of cooking and days of preparation. The Secret behind the mouth-watering cuisine of the state lies in the books of history.

The history of modern Kashmiri cuisine can be traced back to the 15th century invasion of India by Timur, and the migration of 1700 skilled woodcarvers, weavers, architects, calligraphers and cooks from Samarkand to the valley of Kashmir. These skilled cooks called 'Wazas' in kashmiri cook mutton in various forms and have classified them according to the shape the mutton is given. The mutton for different dishes are taken from different parts of sheep, goat etc. Depending upon the nature of the occasion and financial strength of host, seven to thirty dishes from mutton, chicken, cheese, vegetables and fruits are prepared. These dishes are prepared in copper utensils named in Kashmiri 'Degs' or 'Degchas' depending on size of the pot. These pots containing the uncooked dishes are put on logs of burning wood for cooking. These are served in large copper plates called 'Tramies' with rice. Four persons take food in each tramie. The dishes are served in a particular sequence. Of its thirty-six courses. Majority of these are preparations of meat, cooked overnight by the master chef also known as Vasta or Waza, and his retinue of *wazas*. Guests are seated in groups of four and share the meal out of a large metal plate called the *trami*. Although we know that humans respond to a state of positive energy balance primarily by storing excess energy as triglycerides in white adipose tissue, (Savage DB2005) sparse data is available on cardiovascular function and hypercaloric diets in healthy humans.

Contemporary data provides little or no information on cardiomyocyte function and effects of acute caloric Load on the human heart. However, the acute effects of fast-food on vascular function have been reported. (Rudolph TK2007) Such effects have been found, particularly in the postprandial state, where impaired vascular function, low grade inflammation and increased cardiovascular risk have been demonstrated. Postprandial effects on vascular function and inflammation are reversible and temporal with high-fat atherogenic meals providing a direct source of vascular stress. Recently, postprandial effects of a high-fat/high-energy (HF/HE) meal on vascular function and plasma markers of endothelial function and inflammation in young healthy subjects were reported. The authors compared the HF/HE meal to an average breakfast milkshake. The HF/HE shake consumption was associated with a more pronounced increase in heart rate, systolic blood pressure, plasma interleukine-8 (IL-8) and peripheral blood mononuclear cell gene expression of IL-8 and CD54 (intercellular adhesion molecule: ICAM-1) compared with an average breakfast shake consumption. IL-8 might play an important role in dealing with high-fat challenges and could be an early marker for endothelial stress, a stage preceding endothelial dysfunction.

Kashmiri Food

Kashmiri cuisine is highly influenced by its rich culture and history. Having India and Pakistan on either side, the people over the years have an advantage of getting better ideas for cooking from their neighbours as well, in spite of facing political limitations. With the influence of its neighbours as well as the keenness of those who indulge in Kashmiri

cuisine, it is no surprise that Kashmiri cuisine has indeed a great variety to offer its people and those who visit the area. Kashmiri food is richly flavoured with spices like cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, saffron, etc. With these types of spices, Kashmiri meals may have a simple range or one that consists of 36 dishes/parts. This refers to the popular Wazwan banquet that is prepared for big functions like weddings. The spices are special and prepared with great patience and care. Some spices are exclusively used for these preparations and are available only in Kashmir. Kashmir is not just a paradise on earth but also introduces the good culture. Secret behind the mind-blowing cuisine of the state lies in the books of history which speaks of the invasion of Kashmir by Timur in the 15th century AD. This resulted in the migration of hundreds of skilled cooks from Samarkand to cater to the royal tongue. The descendants of these cooks gifted the state the unsurpassable tradition of Wazwan, the delectable aromatic banquet of Kashmir. Wazwan is cooked and prepared under the supervision of Vasta Waza and consists of about 36 courses meal which are mainly meat based. Three different styles of cooking prevail in the state as Kashmiri Pandits, Muslims and Rajput follow their own traditions and proscriptions in cooking. Kashmiri Pandits refrain from the use of onions and garlic, while Muslims love mostly non-vegetarian varieties and avoid the use of asafoetida (hing) and curds. Variations in recipes can also be observed in the different regions of the state. Cooking pattern as seen in Ladakh differs to that Hindu Dogras. This is also due to change in locally produced crops. Kashmiri food that we have today in the restaurants has evolved over the years. Highly influenced by the traditional food of the Kashmiri pundits, it has now taken some of the features of the cooking style adopted in Central Asia, Persia and Afghanistan. Kashmiri food makes an extensive use of turmeric and yoghurt. Superb preparation and fabulous aromatic flavor of the Kashmiri food is so alluring and appetising that even those who are not feeling hungry end up yearning for more. In the making of Kashmiri dishes, garlic and onion are not used much as in the case of other Indian cuisines. Absolutely rich in taste and exotic in flavor, Kashmiri cuisine has become a popular choice. The strong influence of Kashmiri pundits, who are predominantly meat eaters, explains the reason why the cuisine of Kashmir has more of non-vegetarian dishes. Kashmiri thali is preferred mainly for its non-vegetarian dishes. However, there are some real mouthwatering vegetarian dishes too, which are relished by all. Traditional Kashmiri thali consists of Wazwan, which demands lot of preparation. Infact, preparing Wazwan in itself is considered a great art. Substantial time and effort is spent on the making of this special feast. The cuisine of Wazwan encompasses near about 36 dishes. The head chef known as Vasta Waza does all the requisite preparations. It is mostly prepared on some big family occasion or festivity. The use of curd in the preparation of food gives the dish a creamy touch. To enhance the flavor of the meat dishes, Kashmiris add asafoetida (Hing) to it. Other addictive spices used to add to the taste are dry ginger and Saunf (aniseed). Sometimes, ginger is used in excessive quantity that makes the dish pungent. Kashmir being the leading producer and chief exporter of saffron makes an extensive use of it in the form of a colorful flavoring agent. For its amazing aroma, it is added to pulao and sweets. Kashmiri dishes make a regular use of dry fruits, especially in the preparation of

curries. Kashmiris use ghee to cook meals, though in urban areas, well-educated families have started using mustard oil as an alternative, to avoid the intake of high fat in ghee. Kashmiri rice is also quite aromatic and light and thus the Kashmiri rice pulao is well liked by people. Non vegetarian remains a major chunk of food - and this all is due to the climatic conditions. Kashmir used to be covered with snow and remain cut off for more than 4 months in winter. During such a long period it was impossible to have vegetation, so option was nothing but non vegetarian dishes. Fish was always a readily available option. Survival of the fittest was the theory. These Offerings are often put before gods by hindus to please them or to have permission to start non vegetarian food during winter. The festivals like shivratri and fish rice (gaad- batt) are some important festivals. Later on, fish and rice os offered to Gods and which has unbelievably been seen being touches and eaten by God.

Review of Literature

Szczesniak (1970) was one of the earliest researchers to explore specific food attributes, i.e., flavor, temperature, and appearance. Jang, Ha, and Silkes (2009) examined and compared the attributes of six types of Asian foods, namely Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Thai, and Vietnamese for American customers. They found that taste, edibility, and quality are ranked as the top three among Asian food attributes overall, and that Japanese food was most highly rated among the six types of Asian foods. Food-related attributes have been known as critical factors influencing dining preferences, but other factors also should be identified in further examination of dining satisfaction.

In addition to food-related attributes (including presentation, taste, and freshness), Namkung and Jang (2008) identified two more that influence dining satisfaction. These two are atmosphere (spatial layout, interior design, and music) and services (promised service, willingness to help, and competency). In their studies, "appealing food presentation, tasty food, spatial seating arrangement, fascinating interior design, pleasing background music, reliable service, responsive service, and competent employees" were identified as important attributes in contributing to diners' high satisfaction. Further, in a recent research of food attributes it has been observed that, the satisfaction level of local and regional food varies depending on diverse food attributes (jang *et al.*, 2009). By incorporating perceived value - in particular, the concept of experiential value in studying the Japanese restaurants' dining popularity and diners' satisfaction - this particular study proposes to extend previous studies. Perceived value is as an important concept to understand customers' satisfaction in the service industry, and significantly influences customers' purchase decision-making (Ha & Jang, 2010; Zeithaml, 1988) [19]. This study adopts four dimensions of the experiential value, proposed and tested by other researchers (Keng, Huang, Zheng, & Hsu, 2007; Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2001) [8, 10] as main factors to influence dining satisfaction and preference at Japanese restaurants. These four are perceived food quality, service excellence, aesthetics, and playfulness. In this study, food quality is defined as its own features distinguishable from other types of foods (e.g., tasty, healthy, fresh, exotic) (Jang *et al.*, 2009). Perceived service excellence refers to generalized consumer appreciation of a service provider who has demonstrated expertise and provides a dependable service performance (e.g.,

willingness to help, promised service, competency) (Keng *et al.*, 2007; Mathwick *et al.*, 2001) [8, 10]. Perceived aesthetics reflects a reaction to the harmony and unity of visual elements and display in restaurants (e.g., ambiance, architecture, interiors) (Keng *et al.*, 2007) [8]. Perceived playfulness is clarified as an inner experience pursuing an intrinsic enjoyment to escape from routine by engaging activities (e.g., entertainment, escaping from routines, instant gratification) (Mathwick *et al.*, 2001) [10].

Data Analysis and Interpretation

From the analysis of the response from the respondents and from literature review the most common attributes identified were Taste, Flavour, Aroma, Eye Appeal, Freshness, Nutritious Value, Uniqueness, Spiciness, Hygienic preparation of food and value for money. A well-structured questionnaire considering all the attributes was developed and data was collected through primary survey. The respondents were asked to rate the importance of the attributes of Kashmiri food. Each attribute was rated using 5-point Likert's scale

Table 1: Demographic Profile N=200

S. No.	Description	No. of Respondents	Respondents percentage
1			
	Gender		
	Male	120	70
	Female	80	80
2			
	AGE		
	Below 20 years	50	30
	20-40	120	73.33
	Above 40 years	30	46.7
3			
	Marital status		
	Married	110	86.66
	unmarried	90	64
4			
	Purpose of Visit		
	Business	50	30
	Leisure	90	86.66
	others	60	43.33
5			
	Income in Rs.		
	Up to 20000	35	23.66
	20000-50000	75	54.66
	50000-100000	50	45.66
	Above 100000	35	26.66

The demographic profile of the tourist is shown in table-1 above. It is evident from the profile that out of the total respondents 120% are male and 80 % are female, 30% are below age group of 20 years, 73.33% lies in the age group of 20-40 years and 46.7% are above 40 years, 86.66% are married and 64% are unmarried, 30% of respondents lie in category of business tourists, 86.66% in leisure tourist category and 43.33% in other, 23.66% of respondents have monthly income of below rs.20000/-, 54.66% lie in income group of rs.20000/- to rs.50000/-, 45.66% lie in income group of rs.50000/- to rs. 100000/- and 26.66% of respondents have monthly income of above rs. 100000/-.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, inferential statistics was applied on the responses with the help of SPSS software. Mean and Standard deviation was computed based on which the food attributes were identified. The results are shown in the table-2 below:

Table 2: Analysis of Perceived Attributes of Kashmiri Food

Food attributes	Mean	Standard deviation
Aroma	4.01	0.15
Eye appeal	4.90	0.30
Flavour	4.15	0.05
Freshness	3.90	0.30
Hygiene	2.95	0.25
Nutrition	4.46	0.99
Spiciness	4.86	0.35
Taste	3.10	0.10
Uniqueness	3.82	0.40
Value for money	3.74	0.45

Table 2 above displays the results of tourist's response in terms of mean value and standard deviation. The attributes that were found important among the tourists are Eye appeal, spiciness, taste and flavor of food. The most common attributes among the tourists were freshness, It was also observed from the responses of the tourists that, Business tourists gave more preference to Hygiene and and value for money, whereas leisure tourists gave preference to Taste, Flavour, Eye appeal and Uniqueness. On the other hand, rest of the tourists gave preference to Nutrition, Hygiene and Value for money.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Understanding the perceptions of tourist about the products or services is critical in order to gain insight into tourists needs and wants (LeBlanc, 1992). Measures of dining experiences, attribute importance, customer expectations and satisfaction have been diverse and dependent upon the domain of research, in both the number of attributes and level of abstraction. In the hospitality and tourism context, numerous service quality researches have been used to measure customer satisfaction and perception. A new trend is shaping customer service, and it goes well beyond simply providing what guests expect. Today, customer service is being measured against a guest's experience in total - all of your guest's interactions with your company, your facilities, your products, your services and, most importantly, your people. While customer experience has become the industry's new buzz phrase, most are still having a difficult time differentiating between good customer service and a legendary customer experience. Sensory properties, such as texture, play a major role in consumer perceptions of food product quality. By knowing the perceptions of tourists, the food and beverage players can achieve a cutting edge over their competitors' profit share. Thus, this study attempted to understand the perception of Kashmiri food by consumers, which could be helpful to food and beverage outlets in Kashmir's destination. The present research tends to make few unique and practical contributions:

1. In developing primary attributes for regional foods based upon the previous literature and self- structured questionnaire;
2. In generating information food and beverages players about the strength and weakness of Kashmiri food. Although the study is of great importance in similar research area still it has limitation i.e., inability to control the respondent's familiarity with the Kashmiri food because it was difficult to find tourists who were having thorough and authentic information about Kashmiri food. Thus, keeping in view the same facts

the results of the study should be used with further necessary research and with caution, as the perception of tourists and food experiences might be different than that were in past and that will be in future.

5. References

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