



FOOD AND DRINKS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL KASHMIR

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Abstract

The present paper deals with the food habits during the period under study. Contemporary sources revealed that the people were both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Different type of food grains, vegetables and fruits were popular among the people. They were fond of different kinds of juices. People were consuming wine even in the religious festivals unrelated to the rules of Dharamashatras.

Keywords: *Staple, vegetarian, preservation, preparation, betel leaf, wine.*

Introduction

Food consists of one of the most basic needs of the life of people in general. Our sources provide sufficient information regarding the food culture of the people of Kashmir. *Nilamata Purana* provided a number of references related to the items of food which were offered to the gods.¹ It could be easily inferred from them about the food of common people.² The same text also mentions the term *anna* for food which includes all types of grains. References are made in the literary texts about the cooked, dried food items, and their preservation of food.³ The food items are being categorized under the following heads for the purpose of convenience of study:

¹ *Nilamata Purana*, tr. Ved Kumari, Vol. I, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Srinagar, 1968, p.118.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

A. Chief Crops:

i. Rice:

Paddy was cultivated extensively from an early period as it was the staple food for the people of Kashmir. The various preparations of rice mentioned in *Narmamala* and *Nilamata Purana* are boiled rice, rice mixed with sugar and sugarcane, cakes of rice and meal of fried rice.⁴

ii. Barley:

Nilamata Purana frequently mentions barley with reference to the religious ceremonies and offerings to the deities. *Apupa* and *pistaka* (bread and cake) were made from barley.⁵ The first one is the cake made of rice or barley mixed with ghee.⁶ The same source refers that it was provided as a gift to the Brahmanas and relatives.⁷ The other one was a preparatory made of flour.⁸ This is also attested by *Rajatarangini*.⁹ A particular day of the year was observed as a festival when barley became ripe in the field.¹⁰ Barley seems to have been the food for the poor classes. Its various preparations mentioned in the texts are popular nowadays also.¹¹ It is also mentioned by Kshemendra.¹² Besides barley, oats and kudur were also eaten by the poor classes of the society.¹³

iii. Wheat:

Nilamata Purana mentions the term *godhuma* for wheat.¹⁴ It also refers to the various preparations of wheat, which were offered to the deities.¹⁵

B. Pulses:

Nilamata Purana refers to the term *caru* that implies the preparation of all grains given as a gift to Brahmanas and relatives.¹⁶ These were not considered as much important by people. Many types of pulses were mentioned in it. Damodargupta in his *Kuttanimata Kavya* speaks that pulses were consumed by the people during his period.¹⁷ He also informs us of the three different kinds of pulses. Mention may be made of *kaulatha*, *chana*, and *masura*.¹⁸ The same source further tells that beggars and travellers, who received different varieties

⁴ Ibid, p.121.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p.119.

⁷ Ibid, p.121.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Rajatarangini*, tr. M.A Stein, Vol.I, BK VI, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1979,v.228. *Apupa* is rounded bread like loaf. It was forebear of modern *kulchih* now eaten by the people of Kashmir.

¹⁰ S.C Ray, *Early History and Culture of Kashmir*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1969, p.207.

¹¹ *Rajatarangini*, Vol.I, BK I, v.205

¹² *Kalavilasa*, tr. A.N.D. Haksar, Penguin books, Mumbai, 2011, p.95. see also *Desopadesa*, tr. A.N.D. Haksar, Penguin books, Mumbai, 2011, p.113.

¹³ M.L. Kapur, *Kingdom of Kashmir*, Utpala Publications, Srinagar, 2005, p.381.

¹⁴ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.121.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.119.

¹⁷ A.M. Shastri, *India as Seen in the Kuttanimata of Damodargupta*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1995, p.131.

¹⁸ Ibid.

of rice and pulses as an offering from different houses had to eat them by mixing together.¹⁹ Kshemendra mentions a fourth variety called *moong (mudga)*.²⁰ Rice and pulses cooked together were known as *khichdi* (khiccari). This was taken usually in religious ceremonies. Another food item prepared from pulses was *parpata* and *parapara*.²¹

C. Vegetables:

Nilamata Purana mentions the term *saka* for all vegetables. *Rajatarangini* refers to a number of vegetables consumed by the people of Kashmir. It also refers to a *visa* (lotus root also called nadus) used as a vegetable.²² The pumpkin gourd (*tumbhi-phala*), *sandamula* and jujube (*karkandhi*) are also mentioned. Kalhana also mentions a type of grass called *kacchaguccha* (grass).²³ It is still known as *kachidani* as a kind of grass. The plant *uplakasha* now known by the name of *upalhak* and was one of the common vegetables of the Kashmir cuisine.²⁴ *Upalhak* formed the food of the ancient *rishis* according to the traditional belief. It was bitter in taste.²⁵ The bitterness of the taste was removed by boiling. Both these vegetables (*kacchaguccha* and *Upalhak*) were consumed by the poor classes mentioned in *Rajatarangini*. Bates also mentions a wide variety of vegetables i.e. cauliflower, potato, carrot, turnip, pumpkin, onion which were also taken by the people in the valley of Kashmir.²⁶

D. Non-vegetarian products:

The meat was also an important item of food. According to *Nilamata Purana*, there is no evidence regarding the prohibition of meat eating on the five days dedicated to the worship of Vishnu.²⁷ The same text informs us that even Vishnu's image at one place was worshipped with animal sacrifices.²⁸ The Pisachas, Chandodeva and the goddess Bhadrakali were provided offerings, which included the non-vegetarian dishes.²⁹ It is said that the consumption of meat juice removes bodily pain. Damodargupta refers to prostitutes, who used to drink meat juice (soup) for removing bodily pain, which is caused by sexual contact.³⁰ Kshemendra in his *Desopadesa* gave information about a prostitute, who regains youth by eating ghee, onions, milk and fish juice.³¹ *Rajatarangini* mentions fish juice as an aphrodisiac. Fowl, ram, goat, and fish were eaten by the people. Various birds too were eaten. Among the animals whose flesh was consumed a particular reference was made to the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Narmamala*, p.14

²¹ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.123.

²² *Rajatarangini*, Vol. II, BK VIII, vv.134, 143. See also S.M. Devi, *Economic Condition of Ancient India (From A.D 750-1200)*, Ramanand Vidya Bhawan, Delhi, p.26.

²³ *Rajatarangini*, Vol. II, BK VIII, v.211.

²⁴ Ibid, fn. 48-49.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ C. E. Bates, *Gazetteer of Kashmir and the adjacent districts of Kishtwar, Badrawar, Jammu, Naoshera, Punch, and the Valley of Kishen Ganga*, Light and Life Publishers, Delhi, 1980, pp.46-47. see also Suman Jamwal, *Agricultural and Commerce in Early Medieval Kashmir*, Jay Kay Book House, Jammu, 2013, p. 50.

²⁷ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.119.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ A. M. Shastri, p.131.

³¹ Ibid, see also *Desopadesa*, p. 118.

fish.³² Damodargupta gives a detailed account of catching, cooking and eating the fish.³³ He further informs us of a snare stained with flesh which was thrown in the water for catching the fishes. He mentions that it was cooked with spices and its skin and bones were thrown away.³⁴ Marco Polo found that flesh with rice and other food grains formed the principal food of the people of Kashmir.³⁵

E. Fruits:

Besides vegetables, the literary sources provide a detailed account of fruits grown in Kashmir. Hiuen Tsang who visited the valley in the seventh century A.D., gives a long list of fruits during the period under review viz., pear (*ti*), plum (*nai*), peach (*tau*), apricot (*hang* or *mui*), and grapes (*poten*).³⁶ *Nilamata Purana* mentions a number of fruits like pomegranate (*dadima*), grapes (*draksha*) and cherries (*kapittha*).³⁷ It also mentions to grapes as the popular fruit of the valley. The same text refers to that grapes were much relished and were given as a gift for the gods and Brahmanas. The term *mrdvika*, which implies dried grapes as mentioned in *Nilamata Purana*.³⁸ Several references from *Rajatarangini* provided ample information about grapes. Bilhana also referred to it.³⁹

F. Spices and other products:

Ginger (*ardraka*), black pepper (*marica*), saffron was the main spices of the valley. The black pepper was used as a spice to be taken with the preparation of barley. It was also used as a good appetizer and absorbent of intestinal mucus and unassimilated lymphchyle.⁴⁰ Saffron was also produced in the valley. The same text refers that saffron was often connected with the worship of deities.⁴¹ Besides this, it was used as an ingredient in Greek medicine and cuisine and continued also to be so used in Kashmir. It is still mixed with rice by the people of Kashmir.⁴² Saffron has thus remained the product of the Kashmir since ancient times. Garlic was used as a spice. The use of garlic was prohibited among the higher castes of the society especially among Brahmanas.⁴³

G. Drinks:

Drinking of wine seems to be popular in Kashmir. *Nilamata Purana* mentions the term *pana*, which means the drinks in general.⁴⁴ Drinks included both alcoholic and non-alcoholic. The same text also refers to the non- alcoholic drink, which was made of a mixture of *Hima* and *Shakar* (sugar).⁴⁵ It is evident from *Nilamata Purana* that wine was recommended on the religious festivals like New Snowfall Day and *Iramanjari Pujana*.

³² A. M. Shastri, p.132.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Henry Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Vol. I, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, p.166.

³⁶ S. Beal, p.88.

³⁷ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.120.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp.122-21.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.122.

⁴² *Rajatarangini*, tr. R. S. Pandit, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1968, fn. 38.

⁴³ Ibid, BK I, fn.342.

⁴⁴ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, pp.119, 121.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.119.

This evidence is also confirmed by Damodaragupta in his *Kuttanimata Kavya*.⁴⁶ He adds one more festival viz. the second Mahimana in which wine was consumed by the people.⁴⁷ The Kashmir society was not perhaps following the rules of *Dhamashastras* in general as we find people consuming wine during the religious festivals was condemned by the lawgivers. *Nilamata Purana* informs us about *Irapuspasamayuhitam Panam* referring to a wine which was distilled from the flowers.⁴⁸ *Kuttanimata Kavya* mentions that wine was lavishly used both by men and women. According to Damodargupta, prostitutes who were addicted to drinking that imparted fragrance.⁴⁹ The same author also mentions that men were anxious to share the wine, which offered by their beloved after she had tasted it.⁵⁰ Damodargupta tells us that the Brahmanas were prohibited from taking wine as it was against religious faith prescribed by the laws of *Dharmashastras*.⁵¹ Several references from *Rajatarangini* regarding wine were also mentioned. The same text refers that while Lalitaditya marched with his army towards the east a beautiful Karnata lady Ratta who ruled in the south and her territories extending as far as Vindhya hills submitted to him. During this course, the army rested beneath the palm trees on banks of the river Kaveri drinking the wine of coconut.⁵² The same source also informs us that during the period of Lalitaditya and Harsha, the Darads a tribal community, consumed wine frequently and these kings could not tolerate it.

Nilamata Purana mentions the various terms related to sugar juices like *Iksurasa* (sugarcane juice), *Phanit* (sugarcane juice boiled down to one fourth), and *Matsyandika* (sugar juice boiled down to a solid consistency but give out a little fluid on the drawing).⁵³ The grape wine was also common in use during the period under review. Kalhana refers that juices from sugarcane and grape were also consumed by the people of Kashmir. According to him, one *dinara* was said to have been the price of two *palas* of grapes.⁵⁴

H. Betel leaf and betel nuts:

The people of Kashmir had the habit of chewing betel leaves, which were imported from Bengal and Malabar. There are various references regarding the chewing of betel. *Rajatarangini* refers to the king Jayapida, who was habituated with the chewing of betel.⁵⁵ The same authority mentions an episode when Tukharas (Turkish) came to kill the king Harsha.⁵⁶ He invited each of them by his name, offered betel leaves and made them sit down before him.⁵⁷ The hospitality of the king made them feel ashamed. They took betel in the mouth, put down their weapons and gave up all their intention to kill him.⁵⁸

⁴⁶ A. M. Shastri, p.132.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.122.

⁴⁹ A.M. Shastri, p.132

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Rajatarangini*, Vol. II, BK IV, v.155.

⁵³ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.121.

⁵⁴ *Rajatarangini*, Vol. II, BK IV, v.169.

⁵⁵ Ibid, BK IV, v.427.

⁵⁶ Ibid, BK VII, vv.782-86.

⁵⁷ Ibid, BK VII, v.787.

⁵⁸ Ibid, BK VII, v.789.

I. Milk and its products:

Milk and its products formed an important ingredient of diet. *Nilamata Purana* mentions the term *gorasa*.⁵⁹ The same text also refers to a word *ksira*, which was known as condensed milk. Various preparations of milk such as *grhta*⁶⁰ (ghee) and curd are also attested from *Kuttanimata Kavya*⁶¹ and *Desopadesa*.⁶²

To sum up we find the food of the people seems to be very enriched and balanced. The various food items of Kashmir viz., pulses, vegetables, spices, and milk products were popular. The sources reveal that common people were fond of rice, which remains continuous till date. Non-vegetarian products were also consumed by people. Meat eating was not even prohibited during particular days dedicated to the worship of Vishnu. We find people consuming wine even in the religious festivals. Kashmir was well known for its fruits like nowadays.



⁵⁹ *Nilamata Purana*, Vol. I, p.120.

⁶⁰ *Grhta* means purified butter referred to as food and cream. *Ghrta-payasa*, which implied milk porridge of rice mixed butter was recommended for eating on the full moon day of *Pausa*. (Ibid.)

⁶¹ A. M. Shastri, p.131.

⁶² Kshemendra, p.118.