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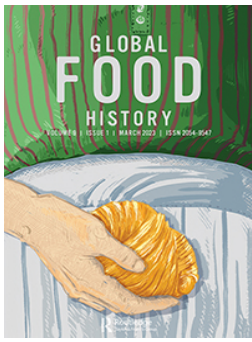
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Narrating Rampur's Cuisine: Cookbooks, Forgotten Foods, and Culinary Memories

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ABSTRACT

Rampur, a princely state established by Rohilla Pathans in 1774, became the cultural node, or *markaz*, of north Indian Muslim culture under the patronage of its ruling Nawabs. This article uncovers the narrative arc of Rampur cuisine and foodways by examining archival sources from the nineteenth century on Rampur's cuisine preserved at the Rampur Raza Library, as well as historical records and gastronomic memory of culinary practitioners and other members of society. Through a process of amalgamation and improvisation, it grew out of the Delhi and Lucknow cuisines into a distinctly Pakhtun (an ethnolinguistic group native to southern Afghanistan and northern Pakistan) foodway, which was adapted and textualized as a new "haute" Rampur cuisine by the Nawabs and the nobility. The study delves into the paratexts of the archived manuscripts – their language, authorship, and authorial motivation – to delineate cultural markers of this culinary journey while also recovering the intergenerational transmission of sensual memories. It interrogates how the narrative arc of Rampur cuisine reveals relationships with the past, epochal socio-political changes, and changing cultural identities with the appropriation and forgetting of foodways.

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Introduction

Food is so tightly woven into the social fabric of a place that one cannot imagine the culture of a region, town, or nation without describing its culinary aspects—the how, when, and why of food and foodways. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson asserts while introducing French cuisine, “cuisine is not merely a culinary code that anchors custom. It is as well a panoply of narratives that sustains praxis.”¹ This study lays special emphasis on the use of cuisine as a source of “culinary capital” described by Peter Naccarato and Katie LeBesco,² its shaping into an instrument of gastrodiploacy by the erstwhile Nawabs of Rampur, and the ultimate decline of the culinary repertory. Gastronomy was a conscious state policy of creating and projecting, as Bourdieu theorizes, the use of “taste” and knowledge of the “right” choices of food as a form of cultural capital and a way of forming a “distinction” between social classes.³ It borrows from the various written and oral histories of Rampur—cookbooks, historical texts with culinary

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references, inter-generational culinary memories—which describe “dietary changes as a socially charged marker of epochal shifts; gender and the agents of memory and contexts of remembering and forgetting through food.”⁴ Further, it delves into the culinary patterns underlying hegemonic polity to attempt and define a gastronomic narrative. Though cuisine is created, amalgamated, and structured in the kitchens, it is vocalized through the dining experience. Thus, the culinary practices, symbolic significance of foodways and transformations in the dining habits also form a part of the narrative.

The study focuses on Rampur, situated in north India about 180 kilometers from Delhi. Historically, Rampur was a Rohilla Pathan princely state established under British colonial rule in 1774. It was a major Muslim-ruled princely state in northern India which survived the destruction of the 1857 rebellion. Rampur became a cultural node, or *markaz*, of north Indian Muslim culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as evidenced by Raza Library, established in the last decade of eighteenth century and still a magnificent repository of manuscripts, paintings, and artifacts. Stationed between two fallen giants of Muslim culture, Delhi and Awadh, it was prosperous enough to absorb the destitute artists, musicians, poets and chefs fleeing the destruction after 1857. It thus became a petri dish for the amalgamation of various subcultures into the Pathan ethnicity of the ruling classes. The “*inquilab*” (revolutionary) transformation from a simpler Rohilla Pathan ethos to a Mughal- and Awadhi-influenced culture is described and bemoaned by the official historian, Maulānā Najmul Ghani K̄hān, as the first phase of the inevitable transformation from the simple Afghan tribal roots.⁵ As K̄hān writes, “Courtly groups, especially the youth, worked hard in their devotion to Delhi and Lucknow, and instead of simple black *lungi* (wraps), embroidered shawls and kerchiefs embellished their dressing styles.”⁶ Thus, according to K̄hān, the influence of Awadh and Mughal cultures on the daily life of the people of Rampur which had begun around the first decade of the nineteenth century was strengthened by the events of 1857 and the migration of artists and writers to Rampur.⁷ Consequently, there was a distinct leaning toward an Indo Persian culture—the practice of Persianate cultural practices in the Indian subcontinent—represented by Mughal and Awadh subcultures in all spheres from literature, language, dress and music to cuisine.

The decline of Rampur as a cultural node after Indian independence in 1947, particularly with the abolition of zamindari and the privy purses, is reflected in the forgotten aspects of its cuisine and culinary practices. The narrative arc of the cuisine marks the complex trajectory—with its politico-economic dimensions—from its princely past through sub-altern transformations to the present with a consequent decline in its culinary repertoire. This study uses written histories, memoirs, and cookbooks—commissioned by the Nawabs and preserved in the Raza Library—as well as oral memories of practitioners and members of society, to reconstruct the arc of Rampuri cuisine. The trajectory of the Rampur cuisine thus exemplifies “how and why certain foods and food-related practices connote, and by extension, confer status and power on those who know about and enjoy them.”⁸

From Tribal Roots to Culinary Fusions (1774– 1880s)

Hayāt i Afghāni, a historical and ethnological study of the tribes of Afghanistan written by Muhammad Hayāt Khan in 1867, describes the genealogy and customs of various tribes of Afghanistan. Lodhis and Yusufzais were the main tribes of Rohilla Pathans who settled in the thirteenth century in the Kather region of north India which later came to be called

Rohilkhand.⁹ Hayāt i Afghāni enumerates the dishes served to guests by Yusufzai tribes: “a *shorbā* (broth) of chicken which was black on top and white below, *halwa* and *khamēri roti* (leavened bread).”¹⁰ Though the two-colored chicken gravy is difficult to visualize, the best cuisine served by the Yusufzais was simple. As the Rohilla Pathans started settling in Kather, they absorbed the influences from the local Hindu populace and the courts of Mughal kings. According to Hussain, the Afghan *zamindars* (landowners) in Kather region find mention in the Āin e Akbari compiled in 1595–96.¹¹ The Rohilla Afghans rose to prominence to play an important role in the politics of the time.

Maulānā Najmul Ghani Kḥān describes the *arz-i ma‘āsharat* (social conditions) and *tamaddun* (culture) of the Rohillas in his two-volume history of the Rohillas published in 1906 which traces the history of Rohilla chieftaincies in Rohilkhānd.¹² As he writes, “When they started settling in Mughal India they started copying the Muslims and the Hindus who were settled in India and they became fond of luxurious living.”¹³ He goes on to recount the influence of the court of Awadh on Rampur Nawabs and the close relations between the Nawabs of the two princely states. In fact, Nawab Mohammad Ali Khan (ruled July 1793–August 1793) was so inspired by the traditions, customs and culture of Awadh that he wished to impose it on the simple people of Rampur.¹⁴ It was also alleged that he had converted to Shi’ism under the influence of the Shia Nawabs of Awadh. As the Rohillas belonged to the Sunni sect of Islam and harbored a hatred toward the Shias, this became one of the reasons for a coup and murder of Nawab Mohammad Ali Khan. His brother Nawab Ghulam Muhammad Kḥān (ruled 1793–1794) was crowned as the Nawab by the Rohilla chieftains. Challenging the coup, at the Second Rohilla War (1794) the British defeated the Rampur forces under Nawab Ghulam Mohammad Kḥān and placed the nine-year-old Ahmad Ali Kḥān, son of the slain Nawab Muhammad Ali

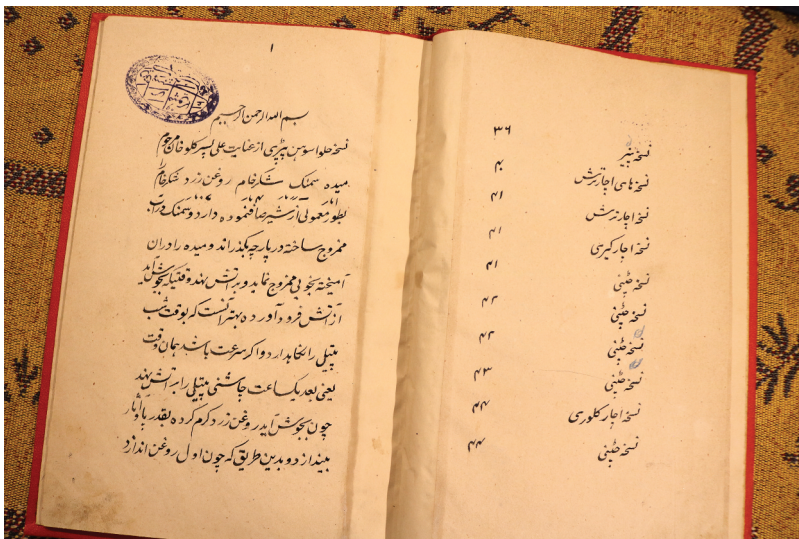


Figure 1. A page from “*Nuskha HaiTa‘ām*.” courtesy Raza Library, Rampur.

Ḳhān, on the throne of Rampur. This was a political turning point in Rampur's history with important cultural ramifications for the future.

Nawab Ahmad Ali Ḳhān (ruled 1794–1840), taking on the reins of his kingdom after the regency period, was severely criticized by Najmul Ghani for his luxurious living and neglect of the administration.¹⁵ The Nawab owed his crown to Awadh and the British powers represented by the East India Company and had a close relationship with the Nawab of Awadh, was greatly influenced by Awadhi culture and possibly practiced Shi'ism. Consequently, Najmul Ghani writes that the period preceding 1857 saw changes in the dress, language, and customs in Rampur under the influence of Awadhi and Mughal culture and a decadence set in.¹⁶ The change in dress from the simple Pathan suits to the Awadhi courtly dress and the elaborate courtly customs were possibly also reflected in the culinary aspect.

Indo Persian Cookbook Manuscripts and the Culinary Connoisseur

Ferguson correctly states that cuisines need words to survive.¹⁷ In the absence of direct textual references to these culinary changes, we can turn to Indo-Persian cookbook manuscripts dating to the nineteenth century preserved in the Rampur Raza Library. An analysis of these cookbooks reflects their role as guides to the aspirational culinary culture of the time. It is rightly said “culinary preparations become a cuisine when, and only when, the preparations are articulated, formalized and enter the public domain.”¹⁸ The earliest manuscripts on cuisine, *Risāla dar tarkēb ta'ām*, written under the patronage of Ḳhānsaheb Muhammad Shah Ḳhān of Nānkār was collected by Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan in the period soon after the end of his regency in 1816.¹⁹ As Nānkār is a *tehsil* (administrative division) of Rampur, Muhammad Shah Ḳhān can be assumed to be a member of the nobility of Rampur or at any rate an educated man of means possibly a *zamindar* (landlord). That Muhammad Shah, a nobleman or *zamindar* was trying to project himself as a culinary connoisseur supports the general trend of a movement away from the tribal, Paḳhtun foodways and an identification with the haute cuisines of the day, namely, the Awadhi and Mughal cuisines. Thus, an atmosphere was created by the rulers and influential nobility where a gentleman from Nānkār commissioned a cookbook in Persian in pursuit of his desire to be distinguished as a gourmand as well as a person of learning. Three more culinary manuscripts, dating from Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan's reign, were either collected or commissioned for reference at the Rampur State library.²⁰ One of these, the *Alwān e ne'mat* by Tika Ram Lucknowi, has an impressive array of recipes ranging from pickles, preserves, *pulā'os*, *āsh*, *halwas* and sweets.²¹ Some of the categories like *kulfi* and *baraf* are not found in other manuscripts. *Dastūr pukhtan* by Sayed Tegh Ali Sandelvi²² and *Kitāb lazzat ta'ām* by Irshad Mirza Muhammad Ali Samarqandi²³ were also commissioned or collected as culinary reference manuals by the Nawab. However we do not know anything about the authors of these manuscripts or their connection to the court. Most of the recipes found in *Nuskha e Shāhjāhāni*, a cookbook from the time of Mughal Emperor Shahjahan (ruled 1628–1658), can be found replicated with some variations in the manuscripts collected at the Raza Library.²⁴ The cookbook manuscripts now available at

Raza Library were either transcripts and copies of the original manuscripts or commissioned by the local elite.

Thus, the first half of the nineteenth century, which saw the collection of the first culinary manuscripts by Nawab Ahmad Ali Khan, may be seen as the beginning of the idea of a high cuisine distinct from simple tribal fare, and the setting of cultural practices around these refined foodways. We can therefore conclude that, as a corollary to other cultural transformations described by Najmul Ghani, the commissioning of cookbooks on Indo Persian cuisine, or the collection of copies of famous cookbook manuscripts started during the reign of Nawab Ahmad Ali K̄hān. This indicates that an era of culinary consciousness and transformation commenced in the first half of the nineteenth century and was further strengthened by the exodus of k̄hānsāmas (chefs) from Awadh and Delhi following the events of the 1857 rebellion. One can conclusively challenge the opinion of local historians of Rampur and the popular belief that the exodus following the events of 1857 led to culinary and other cultural transformations.

Nawab Ahmad's preference for Awadhi culture and championing of Awadhi cuisine can also be seen as an assertion of power and a departure from the Pakhtun roots—in Bourdieu's terms the creation of a "social distinction."²⁵ It can be viewed as the first step toward an elite distinctive cuisine. Moreover, the patron-centered culinary acculturation was a manifestation of gentrification in all spheres—literature, music, dress—which was continued by the subsequent Nawabs of Rampur.

Examining the Indo-Persian cookbooks in greater detail we can make the following observations. Firstly, the language of the cookbook manuscripts was Persian rather than Pashto, the language of the Rohillas. Persian was the language of the Mughal elite and thus the cookbooks of Mughal era were written in Persian too. All the cooking manuscripts at Raza Library, written in chaste Persian rather than the language of the k̄hānsāmas, emulated this Mughal culinary literature.²⁶ Secondly, the "authors" were not practitioners of culinary art but patrons, though cooks as repositories of culinary skills might have been consulted, making them a largely unacknowledged presence in the manuscripts. Thirdly, the intended audience was not the practitioners who were learning the art through internship. Thus, we can conclude that the cookbooks were not for regular consultation by the k̄hānsāmas but served as a record, a frame of reference, a repertory or a culinary aspiration for the ruling classes. It is possible that some of these recipes were tried out by the k̄hānsāmas under guidance of the gourmand and found their way to the royal tables. Thus, from the basic tribal dishes described in *Hayāt i Afghāni* we find nearly two hundred dishes served at Nawab Hamid Ali Khan's grand banquets (ruled 1884–1930).²⁷

The Rampur manuscripts described above begin with a brief invocation to the Almighty and without any preface. The name of the patron is mentioned at the beginning or at the end of the manuscript with the name of the *katib* (scribe) or the *musannif* (author) and the date of writing or transcription. Sometimes the noble patron gastronome is acknowledged as the author. The *kātib* or scribe is mentioned who is probably the actual author of the manuscript. A number of manuscripts are anonymous and without dates. It is possible that some manuscripts did not concern themselves with names of authors or patrons because they were intended to be copies of originals or informal notebooks for future reference.

The cookbook manuscripts follow the culinary categories of Indo Persian cookbooks (as in *Nuskḥa e Shāhjahāni*) of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with *pulā'os*, *qaliyās*, *nans*, *do piyaza*, *kabābs*, *qormās*, *āsh*, *achār*, *chutney*, and *halwas*. Many of the dishes carry names from the *Nuskḥa e Shāhjahāni*. Some examples are *pulā'o Shāhjahāni*, *khichri Daud Kḥāni*, *nān Bāqarḥāni*, named after Mughal elites of the era, along with *qaliyā Shīrāzi*, named after cultural centers.²⁸ Nearly all the dishes mentioned by Maulana Sharar in his evocative anecdotal record of Awadh during the era of Nawab Asaf ud Daulah (1775–97) and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1847–56)—*musallam*, *nahāri*, *sheermāl*, *koko pulā'o*, *moti pulā'o*, *gulathhi*, etc.—are found in the Rampur culinary manuscripts showing a certain uniformity of Indian Muslim “grand” cuisine of the time.²⁹ Secondly, there are a variety of more simple dishes as well —*khichri*, pulses, vegetables etc.—though the recipes have more elaborate ingredients than which might be used by the less elites. Thirdly, there are regional dishes as well as bazaar dishes (*kabāb tarz bazār*)—the preparations available as street food at the time—incorporated into the basic transcript in a unbroken continuum. Some manuscripts have contents with similar dishes clubbed under one heading while others lack structure but have the subsets of dishes written together. The name of the dish is marked in red ink followed by ingredients and their measurements either in old notations or words and then the recipe. The use of notations and terms for measurement of weights of ingredients is significant. The old system *ser*, *pao*, *tola*, *dām*, *chatānk* often indicated by dots and slashes prevalent in Mughal and post Mughal times are used in the manuscripts. The Mughal procedure of *dumpukht*—the sealing of the pot and slow cooking—is often followed. There are no line breaks or page breaks after any recipe. The language is often bland and cryptic, presupposing a basic culinary knowledge of the procedures of the time. The books are lacking in descriptions of what the dish might look like, the aroma or the taste. Most recipes end by simply instructing the reader to lay the dish on a *qāb* (serving dish) and serve hot.

Some other notable features of these cookbook manuscripts also deserve mention. As in the Mughal cookbooks, there is a blurring of boundaries between the sweet and the savory. Often the recipe of a *qaliyā* might end with the instruction to make the dish *chāshnidār* (sweet) by the addition of sweet syrup, which shows an inclination toward sweetened curries—a Persian culinary influence. An interesting aspect is the combination of spices used in the recipes. The recipes vary in the use of red chilies (*surḥ mirch*). Some manuscripts use black pepper but no red chilies while others use red chilies only in *kabābs*, *qaliyās*, *achār* and chutneys. Very often fish and chicken is cooked without red chilies. Though chilies, were brought by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, they were assimilated into the north Indian cuisine only by the late eighteenth century. The manuscripts vary in the use of red chilies. Chilies were prescribed for use in chutneys in *Kḥan e ne'mat* by Nawab Qāsim Ali Khan.³⁰ The other preparations described in the book used pepper. Thus, pepper continued to be the spice of choice for pungency while the requirement for pungency in chutneys and achars were fulfilled by chilies. It is possible that the chilies were found to be too hot to use in the dishes or were considered cheap and subaltern as compared to the expensive and traditionally used black pepper. *Alwan e ne'mat* by Maulana Bulaqi Dehlvi published in 1879 uses black pepper in all spice mixtures.³¹ Since the publication can be presumed to represent Mughal style cooking, it is possible that the elite cuisine did not readily assimilate red chilies.

Copies of some of the manuscripts collected at Rampur are found in other libraries too, showing both their popularity and the penchant of the nobility of collecting recipe manuscripts. For instance, a copy of the *Dastarkh̄wān pukhtan ta'ām*, an anonymous manuscript dating to the nineteenth century, which is a part of the cookbook collection at Rampur is also found at the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad.³² Following the same basic categories of Mughlai dishes, it has certain variations in the methodology of cooking. Further, the measurements of the listed ingredients are missing from Rampur manuscripts. Another manuscript with the very common title, *Kh̄wān i ne'mat*, purports to include recipes from a certain Nawab Qasim Ali Kh̄hān Jung Bahadur.³³ Divya Narayanan opines that Nawab Qasim was possibly the son of Nawab Salar Jang Nishapuri, the brother-in-law of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah (1775–1797) of Awadh, writing in the tradition of elite “patron-connoisseur.”³⁴

The practice of collecting and commissioning cookbooks with a possible transformation in the royal cuisine—which one can say is the rising trend of the learning curve of the cuisine—continued in the second half of the nineteenth century especially after the 1857 rebellion, prompted by a desire for cultural preservation. Nawab Yusuf Ali Kh̄hān (ruled 1855–1865) decided to cast his lot with the British colonial powers in the first war of Indian Independence (1857) and thus the tiny state of Rampur was spared the annihilation of other centers of rebellion. This was a culturally significant move as Nawab Yusuf Ali Kh̄hān was at the forefront of the policy of cultural preservation and of recasting Rampur as the center of Muslim culture under the benign gaze of the British colonial powers. He invited poets, writers, dastangos (story tellers), singers, and musicians, and supported the literary giants of the age, like Mirza Ghalib and Daagh Dehlvi among others. He also commissioned the penning down of the oral dastans (tales) of Ameer Hamza, established the Sadarang school of music, and the Rampur school of poetry. With the exodus of culinary practitioners from Delhi, Awadh and smaller states to the court of Rampur, a conscious effort was made by the Nawabs of Rampur at culinary innovation with the collaboration of these kh̄hānsāmas – a process which carried on till the first half of the twentieth century.

A most interesting manuscript from the post 1857 period in the Rampur Raza Library collection is *Nusk̄ha hai ta'ām* (Figure 1) which identifies Nawab Kalbe Ali Kh̄hān (ruled 1865–1887) as its author and Maulvi Mehdi Ali Kh̄hān Tehsildar as the scribe.³⁵ The identification of the Nawab as the author (or patron) is evidence to the great importance given to setting down culinary traditions for Rampur. Moreover, gastronomy had to be defined by temporal power. The slim, fifty-page manuscript has about forty-two recipes. It begins with the recipe of *halwa sohan papdi* by “Inayat Ali, son of late Kallu Kh̄hān,” most probably a kh̄hānsāmas in the royal kitchens. Further, the eponymous Kallu Kh̄hān is credited for another recipe of *halwa sohan jaozi*. Husaini is another contributor of recipes of two types of *halwa sohan*. Interestingly, this is the only manuscript where one finds the names of the kh̄hānsāmas—the hitherto unacknowledged maestros in the royal kitchens. *Nusk̄ha hai ta'ām* is also unique in the selection of recipes. Unlike other manuscripts, it does not list tens of *pulā'os*, *naans* and *do piyazas*; indeed, all these categories are conspicuous by their absence. Instead, it gives space to halwas, relatively lesser-known sweets and preparations as well as *achars* and chutneys. *Dar Bahisht*, *andarsa*, and eleven styles of *halwa sohan* take the center stage, four of the latter by reputed kh̄hānsāmas of the time. Some delicacies mentioned in later narrative accounts as being cooked in the royal

household such as *kundan qaliyā*, *mankochi* and *dar bahisht* are also included in the text. The manuscript, in its choice of dishes (as well as in its oversight of others), seem to have at its heart the aim of preserving recipes of Rampur “specialties” for posterity. This could be a possible attempt at heritagization and textualization to occupy the void created by the destruction of cultural and gastronomic centers in the wake of 1857 rebellion. The *khānsāmas* from other provincial centers as well as Awadh and Delhi collaborated with Rampur *khānsāmas* to create—in the manner of French chefs of nineteenth century—a “haute cuisine” catering to the taste buds of royalty. Significantly, Nawab Kalb e Ali *Khān* was laying claim to certain aspects of the cuisine as the culinary capital of the princely Rampur State by introducing certain preparations as creations of his *khansamas*. This manuscript in particular can be viewed as indicative of a general movement of cultural preservation prompted by the destruction and repression post 1857.

References to foodways, street food, and cultural landscape from the time of Nawab Kalb e Ali *Khān* are found in *Musaddas e Tahniyat e Jashn e Benazir* by Jān Saheb *Rekhtigo*. The volume describes the annual fair at Benazir Palace commemorating the birthday of the Nawab.³⁶ The text is in Urdu couplets illustrated by several colorful scenes from the *mela* (fair) held in the 1870s. The *randis* (common prostitutes), *tawaifs* (courtesans), dancers, singers, musicians, poets and *dastangos* performing for commoners and kings have all been immortalized in Jān Saheb’s sketches and couplets. Along with other important officials of the realm, there is a rare and important sketch of *Khānsāma* Wazeer Ali *Khān*, who was in charge of the royal kitchens. Jān Saheb also describes the street food being sold at the *mela*: kabābs fried on *mahi tava* (skillet) and barbecued on *seekhs* (skewers), *murmurey ki tikiya* (puffed rice cakes), *halwa sohan*, *halwa jaozi*, *revri*, *pedas*, *laddus*, a red colored *mithai* (sweet), *khēer* “as white as the celestial horse Burraq,” and *dar e bahisht* which looked like paneer.³⁷ It is important to note that the *halwa sohan*, *halwa jaozi* and *dar e bahisht* which were described as street foods and local specialties also find mention in the manuscript “authored” by Nawab Kalb e Ali Khan, the *Nuskha hai ta’am*.

Investigating printed cookbooks from the period, mention needs to be made of *Haftkhwān shaukat* penned by Muhammad Hasan *Khān*, a nobleman from the princely state of Bhopal. It is the oldest surviving cookbook printed in Rampur which ran three editions—1873, 1881, and 1883—during the era of Nawab Kalb e Ali *Khān*.³⁸ The author writes a lengthy preface beginning with invocations to Allah and then his patron Nawab Yar Muhammad *Khān* Shaukat, the grandson of Nawab Ghaus Muhammad *Khān* of Bhopal (ruled 1807–1826). He profusely thanks Muhammad Husain *Khān* of Rampur who requested him to put together the recipes and was instrumental in getting the book published. The author identifies himself as an elite gourmand who “cooked and had cooked” various dishes and noted them down for the benefit of *khush khuraq* (those fond of eating) gentlemen like him.³⁹ The author, Muhammad Hasan *Khān*, also writes about his close attachment to his Rampur benefactor and gives all rights of publication to Muhammad Husain *Khān*, the *muntazim* (administrator) of *Akḥbār dab dabā e Sikandari*, a premier newspaper of Rampur. This conferring of copyrights was something new in the arena of cookbooks as all earlier authors and scribes freely copied and improved upon old manuscripts. There was a certain fluidity and lack of proprietorship in culinary texts. With the coming in of printed cookbooks and their rising popularity in

the mid- nineteenth century, the awareness of copyright as well as the consciousness of regional cuisines increased.⁴⁰

The book has seven broad categorizations of dishes, somewhat corresponding to those in the manuscripts mentioned earlier but the distinguishing factor of this cookbook is the linguistic shift from Persian to Urdu. Secondly, the intended reader is the noble male gourmand.⁴¹ Finally, there is an intermingling of English and Turkish culinary strands into Indian Muslim cuisine not apparent in earlier manuscripts. The second and the last edition of *Haftkhwān shaukat* includes recipes of English and Turkish dishes at the request of Muhammad Husain Kḥān. Thus, the text has *qaliyā wilāyatiyān*, *qehwās*, and other dishes indicated by a symbol to denote that they are *wilāyati khāna* (foreign cuisine).

What we see throughout this trajectory is an attempt at heritagization of culture and its gastronomic aspects as a projection of royal culture. Thus, the successive Nawabs in the nineteenth century made the decision to textualize culinary art to preserve it, codified recipes born out of amalgamations and laid claim to culinary heritage. Moreover, they also determined what needed to be forgotten.⁴² Temporal power defined “good taste” as the royalty consciously pulled away from the rustic tribal roots and, in a bid to acquire finesse, emulated the aspirational Mughal and Awadh subcultures—a transformation criticized by Najmul Ghani. Thus, these nineteenth-century collections at the Raza library were a part of the policy of gentrification of the princely state, a desire to project the Nawabs and the elite as gourmands. The main feature of these cookbook manuscripts was not the inventiveness of the chef or the gourmand but the preservation of old recipes with the aim of amalgamating and building upon the culinary traditions. Thus, the nineteenth century manuscripts collected at the Raza Library, the copying of old texts with the addition of new recipes are evidence of the process of amalgamation and creativity. The manuscript attributed to Nawab Kalbe Ali Khan falls into this category of creativity and continuation as food became a marker of elite identity.

The cookbook manuscripts represent a continuum of North Indian Muslim culinary culture with regional variations in the list of recipes, ingredients as well as cooking procedures. The additions could be a local specialty, a state sponsored innovation or an amalgamation. The overview of the cookbook manuscripts collected, commissioned and preserved in Raza Library—and possibly other manuscripts of Indo Persian cooking dating nineteenth century too—show a certain dynamism and evidence of multiple influences, even though they are part of the continuum of culinary culture of Mughal gastronomy. Similar culinary procedures, slight variations in combinations of spices, and the introduction of new vegetables, fruits and spices are all evidence of a culinary vitality, textured amalgamation, and transformation.

Power, Gastrodiplomacy, and Knowledge Capital (1890s-1949)

The next phase of the culinary arc, commencing from the 1890s, is remarkable for the use of gastronomy as a proxy to temporal and diplomatic power with the Nawab as the powerful culinarian extraordinaire. It is also a period marked by the absence of cookbooks on Rampuri cuisine. Cuisine and its techniques now became “culinary capital”⁴³—a knowledge capital with its human and structural elements—originating from and owned by the Nawab of Rampur: the connoisseur and purveyor of all gastronomic

power in the state. Gastrodiplomacy⁴⁴ became the sine qua non of state policy as Nawab Hamid Ali Kḥān (ruled 1894–1930) built on the repertoire of theoretical knowledge and human resources to project culinary innovations as “heritage” cuisine to be identified with the princely state of Rampur—a “place based identity marker.”⁴⁵ State sponsored culinary amalgamations and creativity continued and gathered momentum. The Nawab Hamid was actively involved in defining cuisine, its distinctive features, and laying claim to it. He also decided how the knowledge of this cuisine should be communicated to future generations. As a fallout of the appropriation of culinary capital by the Nawab in this era when culinary development and gastrodiplomacy reached the pinnacle of success, Rampur cuisine became a jealously guarded knowledge capital. Secondly, the kḥānsāma—the actual innovator and specialist—receded into anonymity. If a guest called the kḥānsāma to compliment him on a dish, the latter would give credit for the recipe to the Nawab.⁴⁶ The kḥānsāma would have an apprentice approved by the Nawab or the *munsif* in charge of the kitchens, and this was the only approved channel of transmission of knowledge. Mehrunnisa Begum, the daughter of Nawab Raza Ali Kḥān (1930–1949), writes in her memoir that the khansamas were reluctant to share the finer points of the recipe even with their own sons fearing that the young ones would take over their place.⁴⁷ The attitude of reticence in sharing recipes, the sons of chefs taking up other professions, and lack of textualization continued beyond the princely era and culminated in the loss of some famed dishes by the 1960s.⁴⁸

To piece together the culinary narrative in the absence of cookbooks on twentieth-century Rampur cuisine, the historian may turn to memoirs and oral history. Nawab Hamid Ali Kḥān’s legendary table with its Indian, Middle Eastern and Western fare was lauded in the written histories of the time. Nawab Hosh Yaar Jung Bilgrami, who lived in the *darbar* (court) of Nawab Hamid from 1918 till 1928, writes that a hundred and fifty kḥānsāmas were employed in the royal kitchens, each specializing in only one dish.⁴⁹ Bilgrami writes: “Such cooks could not be found in the kitchens of the Mughal emperors or in Turkey and Egypt.”⁵⁰ This was possibly the most creative period of the cuisine defined by specialization and innovation. The *pulā’o* kḥānsāma, for instance, would try to innovate new styles of *pulā’o* for Nawab Hamid Ali Kḥān, the gastronome rewarding the spectacular. There were separate kitchens for rice dishes, for sweet dishes as well as and English kitchen for *angrezi* (English or continental) food. Curiously, the Nawab’s kitchens were bare of any red chilies or black pepper, according to Bilgrami.⁵¹ The innovative kḥānsāma had to improvise curries without chilies to be appreciated by foreign guests. The banquets hosted by the Nawab would have seven to eight hundred guests and the table would be laden with several varieties of Indian, Western, and Middle Eastern fare. According to Bilgrami, the guests would “jump” into the dining experience and emerge exhausted after eating several delicious dishes egged on by the Nawab as a perfect host. He further writes that the British, Iranian and Turkish guests would set aside their bland cuisines to eat Rampuri cuisine.⁵² Food became a cultural performance and the table, a theatrical arena of soft diplomacy.

Mehrunnisa Begum writes that Nawab Hamid Ali Kḥān “overpowered” the guests with the spread. She narrates an incident when a hapless guest was made to sample a spoonful each of the two hundred dishes—thirty chicken dishes, twenty five meat dishes, fifty lentil dishes, ten *pulā’os*, and several other delicacies. After two and a half

hours of eating, the guest had to summon the physician, was administered ENO salts, and remarked that the banquet nearly killed him!⁵³

Jahanara Habibulla, the sister in law of Nawab Raza, writes of the grand repertoire of dishes which graced the royal tables—*shabdegh* (meat and turnip curry), *dumpukht pulā'o* (pulao with whole chicken or quail), *urus e behri* (fish), *dar e bahisht* (sweetmeat), *muzafar* (sweet made of special pasta and saffron) and *naan e santara* (orange cake).⁵⁴ Most of these elaborate dishes are now confined to food memories of the older generation. Mehrunnisa Begum also writes that ten *pulā'os* were served at Nawab Raza Ali K̄hān's table of which the basic *yakhni pulā'o* is all we serve today in Rampur. This period was the high point of the centrality of cuisine, the spectacle of culinary theatrics and its weaving into the cultural matrix. The Nawabs wanted to strike awe with the culinary magnificence of his tables as a part of the display of cultural supremacy—a proxy for temporal power—as the princely states lost real power. The Nawab and the elite classes were the patrons and their idea of taste extended from the *shahi khāna* (royal cuisine) to the simple quotidian fare. Not only was the Nawab actively involved in setting standards and increasing the repertoire of cuisine, he was also setting the standards of taste based on his own discernment of flavor, aroma, color, and finesse in the gastronomic arena. The aesthetics of gastronomic appreciation were being vocalized and set for the high cuisine, as well as the “low” cuisine of the masses. However, Nawab Hamid enjoyed the humble *khichdi* too and once appreciated the dish so much that he rewarded the *khānsāma* by sending all his sons to study at the Aligarh Muslim University⁵⁵—all but one who would remain at Rampur to learn the culinary skills of his father.⁵⁶ Thus, the idea of culinary excellence became a distinctive element of the royal Rampur culture.

Nawab Raza Ali K̄hān's era was marked by a more western ethos in all spheres and his sister-in-law, Begum Jahanara Habibullah, writes in her memoirs that the Nawab was keen on western style, thought, and culture.⁵⁷ Thus, from November to January, there were rounds of hunting parties, dinners, and dances for Indian and English dignitaries. Begum Habibullah describes banquets at Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve at K̄hasbagh Palace.⁵⁸ During the time of Nawab Raza, the women of the royal family started coming out of the purda in 1930s and 1940s, getting formal education at English boarding schools,⁵⁹ and possibly embracing and influencing the culinary transformation. The English kitchen was given a separate space in the geography of the elite houses and the *khānsāma* or the butler learned the cooking and serving of English and Continental cuisine. Rosaville, the maternal home of Raffat Zamani Begum had an English and Indian kitchen supervised by chefs trained in the cuisine.

The elites emulated the courtly culture, distinguished themselves by their cuisine, knowledge of foods and serving styles and became conduits for the diffusion of culture to the local power holders. It was generally the male members of the household who adapted the new foodway into their daily diet as they were more actively engaging with the colonial princely state rather than the women protected by traditional lives.⁶⁰ The *khānsāmas* learned from each other through apprenticeship and informal arrangements. This knowledge was carried from the royal kitchens to the elite kitchens and most of the families in this era wanted to embrace the occasional English and continental meal, setting a high premium on the *khānsāmas* who were trained in its preparation.⁶¹ The everyday alterations in cooking and serving food are central to the entangled histories and oral accounts of the period. In the typical

pattern described by Pilcher, the cuisine of Rampur also did not follow the imperial menu as a “*prix fixe*” but chose the items “*a la carte*” that could fit within their culinary culture.⁶² Hence the roasts, puddings, stews and cakes were altered to suit the Indian palate, generally with the addition of more spices, and became a part of the elite tables in Rampur as well as in other cultural centers.

Kitchen Infrastructure

It would be pertinent to describe the base of the knowledge capital, human and physical structure of the royal kitchens here. Food was seen as a separate and important department of the administration under the Mughal dynasty with Mir Bakāwal (steward or chef) as the official incharge of the kitchens.⁶³ Moreover, there was the ever present fear of poisoning. Thus, like the Mughals and Awadh Nawabs, an elaborate procedure of sealing the dishes before serving them was followed at Rampur. The Nawab’s food was prepared in a separate kitchen and state officials, physicians and chefs were present at the time of sealing of the food. When Nawab Raza Ali K̄hān sent his children to study in boarding institutions in Lucknow, cooked meal for the princesses was sent everyday by train in sealed containers.⁶⁴

The Administrative Report (1889–90) includes the budgets of the two well-equipped kitchens—the Indian and the English—under their respective *munsarims*.⁶⁵ The royal kitchens were divided into two sections—Indian and English—at least from 1889. Mehrunnisa Begum writes that the kitchen expenses of Nawab Hamid Ali K̄hān were 250,000 rupees on Indian kitchens and 1,50,000 rupees per year on English kitchens.⁶⁶ In current terms, it would approximately translate to an annual expenditure of 8.3 crores on Indian kitchens and 4.5 crores on English kitchens.⁶⁷ The kitchens in the modern Khasbagh Palace, built by Nawab Hamid outside Rampur city area, were located behind the palace in a large block which is inaccessible now. We don’t have any historical record of the physical structure of the kitchens in the time of Nawab Hamid or of his successor Nawab Raza. Majid Khansama who worked there from the 1960s described the kitchens as having eleven *bhatti* (ovens) in a long row right at the center with a chimney above the stoves. The cooking was done standing up and the cooks could work simultaneously from either side of the ovens. Coal was used as fuel and the ovens were fired in the morning by the servants and kept going until late in the night. We know that this physical setup had continued from the era of Nawab Raza Ali Khan because Majid Khansama joined right after Nawab Raza’s death in 1966. Possibly the same cooking technology was used in the time of Nawab Hamid. According to Majid’s narrative, there were no wood fired *chulhas* in the royal kitchens, which was common in the Rampur households at that time. As coal was also used to generate electricity in Rampur, it is quite probable that the coal ovens were in use after 1899, when electrification started and coal was sourced for the same.⁶⁸ There were similar kitchens in Blocks A, C, and D of the palace, which continued to be in use until the late 1980s.⁶⁹ By the 1960s, according to Majid’s description, electric heaters, refrigerators and deep freezers came to be used in the kitchens and pantries. The traditional wire mesh cupboards, known as the *ne’mat khānās*, also continued to be used for storing food and groceries. There were servant quarters near the kitchen block in Khas Bagh, but most of the *khānsamās* came from their houses with just a few staying on site.⁷⁰

The *qila* (fort) situated inside the city was the oldest establishment housing the royal family, the court and offices. It had three main kitchens: one exclusively for the Nawab, one for the royal family members and guests, and one in the *zenānā*, or women's quarters.⁷¹ Extrapolating from the contemporary physical set up of Khas Bagh kitchens, one can assume that kitchens inside the fort were modernized in the way detailed above at the time of Nawab Hamid to have similar cooking technology. Mr S.S. Alam, who was the member of the Khursheed Girls College Committee, described the breaking down of the coal stoves in the kitchen area of Shahenshah Manzil when it was converted into Khursheed Girls College after the merger in 1949.⁷² Since Shahenshah Manzil was used to house the important begums of Nawab Hamid, one can assume that the ovens dated to his reign. No historical record exists on kitchen layout for the time before Nawab Hamid. Presumably, wood-fired chulhas existed in the kitchens.⁷³

The cooking set up used at the time of Nawab Raza possibly borrowed physical structure from the colonial kitchens because my house in Rampur, a colonial style bungalow, has a smaller version of the royal kitchen described by Majid. Constructed in 1936 it used to function as a club for British officials stationed in Rampur. The kitchen block was to the west of the house connected to the main building by a covered passage. The kitchen with coal fired ovens (*bhattis*) with the chimney above was similar to what Majid described at Khasbagh. It had four burners on a square oven rather than ovens in a row. The washing area is on one side, with another platform near it presumably to dry the utensils after washing. The person washing up would have had to squat on the floor to wash the utensils. There is another platform near the door, for the grinding stone, and one more next to the washing area to keep the dishes after washing. Both the platforms were gently sloping to allow water drainage. A wall cupboard for utensils completed the bare minimum facilities for the *kḥānsāmas* used to roughing it out. The pantry next to the kitchen had two wide stone slabs across its length on one side to keep cooked food, and other ingredients. The layout of the kitchen with its late colonial-style cooking technology was typical of all colonial bungalows constructed during the British era. Cecilia Leong-Salobir opines that the colonial kitchens were located away from the main house for fear of contagion.⁷⁴ The memsahibs were required to play only a supervisory role as the weather was too hot and humid for them to actually indulge in daily cooking.⁷⁵ In Rampur too the Begums, the female members of the Nawab's family, were never expected to be in the kitchens, and conveyed orders through the *munsarim*.⁷⁶

Dining Styles

Bourdieu emphasized the distinction in “the working classes and bourgeois way of treating food, of seeing, presenting and offering it.”⁷⁷ Since dining is the socialization of food culture—a collective experience which conveys the cuisine to others in society—it would be prudent to uncover the arc of dining style and etiquettes. The Rohillas, as the Ottomans, were originally tribals when they came to India, and even after settling down here carried remnants of the tribal ethos. After the establishment of Rampur state, the Nawabs signed a covenant stating that the *sardār* chieftains were *shareek* (partners) in kingship distinguished from the *rakyat* (ruled) and pledged to take care of the rights of the *Afghana*.⁷⁸ Thus, the heads of the various families traditionally feasted with the

Nawab and communal eating on special occasions to reinforce tribal ties was a part of the Rohilla Pathan ethos since before their settling down into Rohilkhand. The Nawab was dependent on the support of the chieftains even after the establishment of Rampur under the British colonial rule and Najmul Ghani writes of the informality and closeness between the chiefs and the Nawabs in that era.⁷⁹ After the failed coup and defeat of Rohilla sardars at Second Rohilla War (1794), the power equation changed; the source of power was now Awadh. Nawab Ahmad Ali, mistrusting the chieftains who had betrayed his father created a distance between himself and the chieftains. Along with the change in dress and lifestyle, informal banquets moved away from simple tribal meat curries and rice dishes to more elaborate preparations as Awadhi cuisine and the etiquettes of serving learned from the Awadh court came into play. Thus, much of the blustering informality and familiarities of common ties were intentionally set aside.

In upper class and middle-class Muslim cultures food was generally served on a long strip of cloth spread on a bench, floor, or on a table called *dastarkh̄wān*. The term also refers to the entire meal setting with *dastarkh̄wān* at the center. Food in Rampur was served on *dastarkh̄wāns* as is evidenced in *Haftk̄h̄wān Shaukat* —the first cookbook printed in Rampur in 1873 by gourmand Muhammad Hasan Khan—instructs the nobleman on laying the *dastarkh̄wān* serving the dishes, and arrangement of entertainment for a private gathering.⁸⁰

Sometime during the reign of Nawab Hamid, the *dastarkh̄wān* was replaced by the British style dining table in the palaces of the Nawab. In photographs preserved at the British Library and the Raza Library dating to 1911, there is a glimpse of the grand dining hall at the Machhi Bhavan palace (see [Figure 2](#)). The series of photographs show the



Figure 2. The Royal Dining Hall. Date c. 1911. Courtesy Raza library, Rampur.

interiors of the palace with the drawing rooms, private bedroom of the Nawab, galleries and the grand dining room. The decor is distinctly European with hand painted wall-paper, wainscoting, and ornate doorways.⁸¹ The formal dining hall has a long, probably oakwood table with several upholstered chairs running the length of the hall with silver candelabras placed at intervals. There are two chairs placed at the head and foot of the table. A glittering chandelier hangs above the dining table. On the opposite wall are china cabinets and a silk screen. The floor is covered with specially designed carpets. In keeping with the changed dining style, the *rakābdārs* (sous chefs) now learned the English style of laying tables and serving the courses for formal dinners. The private dinners however continued in the old *dastarkh̄wān* style. Nawab Hamid ate once a day all alone or with some of his *musahibs* (cronies) where the court physician Dr. Abdurrahēm K̄hān was present to taste the dishes—to ensure that it was free of poison⁸²—and attend to him; a *maulvi* recited the *bismillah* invocation at each morsel raised to the royal lips.⁸³ Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century along with changes in foodways, there were changes in the etiquette of serving food.

The subsequent nawab, Raza Ali K̄hān (1930–1949), followed a similar style of dining, alternating between the English dining table and the occasional informal *dastarkh̄wān*. His daughter Princess Mehrunnisa writes that food was laid out with silver cutlery and served by gloved servants holding the trays shoulder high.⁸⁴ The Nawab offered drinks to his guests in Waterford wine glasses.⁸⁵ Formal state dinners with royalty from other princely states, and other dignitaries were hosted on dining tables. A photograph of a formal dinner probably at Mussoorie attended or hosted by Nawab Raza, his wife, Raffat Zamani Begum, her sister, Begum Fakhra Masuduzzafar Khan, as well as dignitaries from Rampur, Kapurthala, Lucknow, Lahore, and Patna (see [Figure 3](#)).



Figure 3. Dinner possibly at Mussoorie attended by HH Nawab Raza Ali Khan, his wife, HH Raffat Zamani Begum and other dignitaries. Photograph by Muneeza Shamsie.

Princess Mehrunnisa narrates an embarrassing incident when she was ten and was dining with her family on a *dastarkhwan*.⁸⁶ The practice of dining on the *dastarkhwan* was possibly reserved for informal and family occasions. In the picture below Nawab Raza is seen at the head of the *dastarkhwan* dining at a male-only dinner at Khasbagh palace. The guests, identified by a member of the royal family, belonged to the aristocratic and old families of Rampur. The picture dates to the 1950s or 1960s when the erstwhile Nawab hosted dinners to support the candidature of his son in law Nawab Mehdi Ali Khan for the central Parliamentary elections. It has the echoes of tribal feasts of early Nawabs. The guests are served traditional curry, pulao, and sweetmeats by uniformed waiters, and are seen eating with their hands (see [Figure 4](#)).

Until the 1980s wedding receptions in the middle class and lower income group households would often have the guests seated on the floor. Sometimes there would be low tables set in rows on which food was served.

Gender and Kitchen Hierarchy

Masculinity pervades the culinary developments at Rampur court and the voices of women are absent from the larger gastronomic discourse till the 1930s. The royal kitchens were gender specific places, and all the cooks as well as their helpers were males in the male section of the palace and females in the *zenanas*. However transgendered *khwajasaras* might have been employed in various capacities. The latter could access both parts of the palace and were often used to carry missives and oral instructions.

The *khānsāmas* who were central to amalgamations and creativity in Rampur kitchens were all male. Moreover the kitchens were located in the *mardana* (male



Figure 4. Dastarkhwan at Khasbagh Palace with Nawab Raza Ali Khan at the head photo by the author.

area) of the palace which was out of bounds for women. In the Rampur qila there are three sets of kitchens-- one catering to the royal family and guests was near the *toshakhāna* or treasury right next to the Machhi Bhavan palace, and one right behind the palace catered to the Nawab. They were some distance away from the *zenana* (women's quarters) and it is highly unlikely that the Begums or princesses ever stepped into the all-male domain. The harem had its own kitchens attached to the Begum's mahal, Iqbal Manzil. The lesser Begums and concubines also had their own personal, well-equipped kitchens, though the *khāsa* (special food) came in large *nashteydaans* every day from the main kitchen.⁸⁷ Since the Begums had their own *kahari* (maids) and staff, they had the option of preparing their own meals. Mehrunnisa Begum writes of the delicious meals prepared by her mother for her in the *zenana* which she was allowed to eat with her fingers.⁸⁸ This was a change from the meals at the palace with cutlery which had become a part of the formal dining style. We do not have records of food cooked by the ladies in the *zenana* or if they contributed to the culinary repertoire, or indeed if the transformation and creativity that marked the gastronomy of the period was reflected in those kitchens. It would be interesting to know more about the culinary practices in the *zenana*. However, in the absence of written and oral records, it is impossible to tell the influence of the ladies of the harem on the cuisine. The Nawabs never dined in the *zenana*. Even in the Khas Bagh palace the kitchen blocks with the English, Indian, and sweetmeats sections, were near the A Block where the Nawab resided. The *zenana* was again at the other end of the palace with separate kitchens and staff.

It is possible that Begums from other princely states, like Nawab Hamid's first wife, Sultanat Ara Begum from Jaora, brought their own *khānsāmas* and contributed to the repertoire cooked in the palace. Angma Dey Jhala describes the influence of queens from other princely states transforming the cuisines of the states into which they were married.⁸⁹ However, no such evidence, written or oral, can be seen in the culinary history of Rampur cuisine. The courtly women until the time of Nawab Hamid were secluded in the harem and their influence on the culinary arc is not clear. Possibly, the culinary culture remained male dominated with the centrality of the Nawab as the gastronome connoisseur till the 1930s.

A change was effected in the courtly culture when Nawab Raza's wife, Her Highness Raffat Zamani Begum emerged out of purdah in 1930. The first lady, educated in English, Urdu and Persian, entertained official guests at banquets and sat for official pictures. Mehrunnisa Begum writes of her stepmother as being a strong personality who wore sarees, western clothes and the latest make up.⁹⁰ She lived with her husband in the A Block of Khas Bagh palace and oral history says that the *munsarims* of the kitchens would come every day to discuss the menu with the Nawab and his Begum.⁹¹ Since Raffat Begum's father, the chief minister Sir Abdus Samad Khasan favored English cuisine, the Begum might have exercised her influence on the menus and culinary traditions in that direction too.⁹² Thus, gender served as a marker of kitchen hierarchy. Whereas we have an occasional mention of the *khānsāma* in a cooking manuscript⁹³ or in the local *tazkiras* (accounts),⁹⁴ the contribution of women as begums or as maids in the culinary narrative went largely unacknowledged.

The Era of Forgetting and Fault Lines (1950s-1970s)

After Indian Independence and the merger of Rampur State into the Indian Union in 1949, Nawab Raza continued to entertain important political figures of the time—from Lord Mountbatten to Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel—with food as the main cultural prop.⁹⁵ Gastrodiplomacy was ingrained in the royal power structure of the time. Though Nawab Raza reduced the number of *khānsāmas*, and probably the kitchen budget compared to his predecessor, he still wanted to project the grandeur and political significance of the erstwhile princely state through culinary magnificence at the royal banquets.⁹⁶

In 1949 Rampur became the first princely state to cede into the Indian Union. Nawab Raza Ali *Khān* was granted a handsome privy purse and a number of private properties. The *khānsāmas* were now repositories of culinary excellence from a bygone princely era. The “*khānsāma* era” continued after Indian Independence as the displacements and adjustments in power structures post-independence brought about inevitable changes in the households. The ruling classes struggled to maintain a semblance of past glory. The cooks in Nawab Raza Ali *Khān*’s household were reduced from a hundred to thirty, but the dishes served at the famous *Rampuri dastarkhwan* at state banquets remained at around one hundred.⁹⁷

In 1950 there was a drastic change in the land ownership laws of the country. The *zamindari* system of feudal land ownership by the nobility was abolished by the Indian government. This hit the upper classes financially, leading to a downsizing in the grand lifestyle of the landed gentry and a reduction in the number of servants. But the trusted *khānsāma* continued to hold sway over the kitchens, dishing out roasts and puddings along with *biryānis* and *qormās* with *élan*. The elite classes, with their superior education and polish, adapted to the political and economic realities by taking up professions with the Indian government and commercial setups. They fanned out all over the country on their assignments, often taking their *khānsāmas* with them. The local styles of cooking influenced the home cooking especially after the old *khānsāmas* retired and local helps were hired. Yusuf Ali Khan, the brother of Raffat Zamani Begum had taken up an assignment with a shipping company in Calcutta. The family hired a Bengali cook trained in English cuisine to assist their Rampur khansama who learned from the latter and took over the kitchen. Similar changes were taking place in other households with consequent learning and amalgamations in the foodways.

With greater flexibility in the *purdah* system, the ladies of the elite households started to come in direct contact with the *khānsāmas*. There was a change in the domestic arrangements too as the *khānsāma* could access the *zenana* area. Interestingly, young ladies who married into the royal and elite families were also sent to observe the *khānsāmas* and learn the culinary art. It was more important for the lady to discern the taste of the dish, rather than to do the actual cooking. The acculturation of taste was important to be able to impress and dominate the *khānsāma* in the kitchen. The determination of the traditional or original taste inside the house lay with the oldest lady of the house, who instructed the *khānsāma* more closely; together they became repositories of taste, processes, and culinary secrets to be conveyed to the next generation. These were the quotidian intimacies of the kitchen which came into focus now. The women and the *khānsāma* decided what dishes could be adapted to parsimony and the

dishes which would drop out of the menu because the ingredients had become too dear. So maybe not in the grand histories, the culinary prowess of women remained as transgenerational collective family memories.

The Last Cookbook and the End of the *Khānsāma* Era

Shāhi Dastarkhwan by Latafat Ali Khan, a Rampuri *khānsāma*, was the last cookbook on Rampur cuisine, published in 1948.⁹⁸ It is the only cookbook written by a chef from a family who had worked for generations in the royal Rampur kitchens. The editor and owner of the publishing house, Ismat Book Depot, writes that the volume was intended to preserve the recipes honed by gourmands and Nawabs through the ages. Amina Nazli, the author of *Ismati Dastarkhwan*, writes in the preface that most of the cookbooks of the time were written by men who were armchair connoisseurs, and her book brings forth recipes by women, the actual practitioners.⁹⁹ This was a significant change from the earlier cookbooks. *Shahi Dastarkhwan*, based on this model, goes a step further by getting a chef to write the recipes—a labor of love that takes nearly thirteen years to get published. Another aim of the book was to make the dishes from the dining table of the kings accessible to the prosperous middle class. Hence the unique feature of the book is the inclusion of approximate expenditure on each dish as well as the time taken to cook the dish. Very often the author instructs the lady to get the spices ground presumably by the cook or the cooking help. The important thread running through the two books was that the intended audience was the lady of the house cooking with the help of the cook or instructing the cook.

In 1971 the government of India in a landmark legislation abolished the privy purses exacerbating the financial situation of the ruling classes. The years following the abolition of privy purses and the resultant austerity was an era of fault lines and the beginning of “forgetting” in the arc of Rampur cuisine. The royalty had to manage with skeletal kitchen staff and could hardly maintain the vast palaces with their limited income. Moreover, the death of Nawab Raza Ali *Khān* in 1966 plunged the royal family into a legal battle which would continue until 2020. Meanwhile, the landed gentry continued to sell their assets to survive. Their children took up jobs outside Rampur. The city itself suffered from neglect by the state government and the dying of local industries.¹⁰⁰ A report in a local newspaper, *Rampur Digest*, in 1962 declared that at least more than 50% of the people of Rampur were unemployed because of the closing down of factories.¹⁰¹

Many *khānsāmas* left or were asked to leave employment in the former royal household, causing them to lose social standing in search of employment. For instance, some set up shops in the local bazaars or prepared food at weddings and funerals, often narrating tales of the royal kitchens.¹⁰² Being a *khānsāma* was no longer a rewarding career and thus the offspring of the *khānsāmas* took up other professions. Thus, the *khānsāmas* became a piece of collective family memory. Since they were illiterate and their children did not care to learn their skills, the end of the *khānsāma* era meant the loss of a rich repertoire of Rampur cuisine and food memories. Occasionally there was an odd *shagird*, or sous chef, who stepped into the shoes of the old *khānsāma* – but never completely. The delicate nuances and subtexts to the recipes as well as some complicated dishes were deliberately kept a secret by the wily *khānsāmas*.¹⁰³

It was the time of phasing out of the quintessential *khānsāma* and the handing over to the young successors who had never witnessed the grandeur of the *burrā khānas*—the

grand banquets hosted by the then prosperous royal classes and elites.¹⁰⁴ Some women, anticipating the change, started jotting down the recipes from the *khānsāmas*. Muneeza Shamsi, niece of Raffat Zamani Begum, writes of the recipes jotted down by her mother, Jahanara Begum, in English, attributed to her old *khānsamā* from Rampur.¹⁰⁵ While there was a proliferation of published cookbooks for Delhi and Lucknow cuisine since the 1940s, the Rampur recipes are only found in *Shāhi Dastarkh̄wān* and in personal diaries. The finer points of the daily dishes were hardly ever written down but were almost cast in stone—the tempering of dals, the texture of kabābs as well as the food combinations were conveyed to the future generations by the older lady.

The gender balance in the kitchen underwent a change with the departure of the *khānsāma* and most households turned to the less expensive option of hiring a maidservant—the Bua. The lady now had to instruct, train the Bua or the sous chef who could manage the basic traditional recipes under her supervision. The understudies and the Buas who now took over the kitchens had only an abbreviated version of the menu from the *khānsāmas* and had little or no idea of the intricacies of serving a meal. As a result of straitened circumstances, inadvertently there was an essentialization and simplification of the cuisine where the easy to replicate and more iconic dishes remained on the menu and the complex preparations made only rare appearances and ultimately dropped off the menu. One such dish was the *shabdegh*. It was probably adapted into the Rampur cuisine from Awadh. *Shahi dastarkh̄wān* opines that the *shabdegh* cooked in Rampur is far superior to any other.¹⁰⁶ Probably because of long hours of cooking time it became an occasional fare. Today very few Rampur households cook the dish. The numerous styles of Indian dishes alongside French and British cuisine, with all their alterations and innovations, which until recent times were prepared in elite kitchens of Rampur, were forgotten by the 1980s or reduced to food memories.¹⁰⁷ The fare was now completely free of the rarefied pretensions of an exclusive cuisine with a glorious past.

Conclusion

In 2013 a food show hosted by Princess Naghat Abedi, daughter of Nawab Murtaza Ali Khan and Majid *khānsāma* helped the cuisine emerge out of a stasis. What followed was a blitzkrieg of food shows as members of Rampur royal family claimed back their visibility by making regular appearances in glossy magazines, coffee table books, and social media.¹⁰⁸ Rampur cuisine started regaining its place in the imagination and mind space of the public. The *khānsāmas* and chefs claiming knowledge of ancient recipes and descent from the famed royal *khānsāmas* often teamed up with members of the erstwhile royal family, and presented Rampur food festivals and food shows.¹⁰⁹ Sometimes *khānsāmas* created idiosyncratic dishes like *gosht ka halwa* (meat halwa), *neem ka halwa* (bitter neem leaves halwa), and *lehsuni kh̄heer* (garlic custard) to excite and intrigue the media. However, of the elaborate fare of the royal tables described by Jahanara Begum, few dishes remain on the elite menu.¹¹⁰ Members of the royal family regularly feature on social media, food channels and press seated at their dining tables with the *khānsāma* in attendance, laying claim to royal food memories and the gastronomic legacy of Rampur. There is, in a sense, “gustemology”— an organization of a wide spectrum of cultural aspects around sensory attributes of food.¹¹¹ However, as this article has shown, the resurrected cuisine is a sparse shadow of its former glory. The nouveau taste culture espoused by foodies and cultural elite in India today, uses the terms “authentic”

and “distinctive” loosely to create taste ideals glossing over the textures of cultural transformations that mark the evolution of a foodway. Today the culinary media projects Rampur cuisine in a manner expected by the audience—a royal cuisine narrated against the backdrop of grand palaces.

Rampur’s cuisine inspired by Mughal and Awadhi cuisines and honed by the creativity of the *khānsāmas* from these and other cultural centers evolved into a haute cuisine supported by the royalty and elite patrons which faded out with their economic decline after the merger of the princely state into the Indian Union. The development of Rampur cuisine is an antithesis to the generally held view of foodways as a monolithic, static entity linked to geographical location. It can be viewed as a process with cultural intimacies and entanglements and a strong central narrative where the cuisine was consciously developed and adapted to bolster the power structures and was an important facet of cultural performance. Today Rampur, as other small towns of Uttar Pradesh, indulges in “gastro-adventure,” consuming exotic foods from different parts of the world, as the inevitable Pizza Point, Shawarma, KFC, and Dominos are patronized by the prosperous middle class.¹¹²

Notes on contributor

Tarana Husain Khan is a writer and cultural historian. Her writings on the oral history, culture, and the famed cuisine of the erstwhile princely state of Rampur have appeared in prominent publications such as *Al Jazeera*, *Eaten Magazine*, *Scroll.in*, and in the anthologies *Desi Delicacies* (Pan Macmillan, India) and *Dastarkhwan: Food Writing from South Asia and Diaspora* (Beacon Books, UK). She is the author of historical fiction, *The Begum and the Dastan*, which won the Kalinga Literary Award for fiction, was shortlisted for Women Writer’s Award by She The People, and Longlisted for Auther Award. Her book on Rampur cuisine, *Degh to Dastarkhwan: Qissas and Recipes from Rampur*, has been published by Penguin Random house India. She is currently working on a Research Fellowship at the University of Sheffield for an Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project, “Forgotten Food: Culinary Memory, Local Heritage and Lost Agricultural Varieties in India.”

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Notes

1. Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, 4.
2. Naccarato and LeBesco, *Culinary Capital*.
3. Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
4. Holtzman, “Food and Memory,” 364.
5. *Khān*, *Akḥbār uṣ-ṣanādeed*, 2:510–12.
6. *Ibid.*, 2:511.
7. *Ibid.*, 2:512–13.
8. Naccarato and LeBesco, *Culinary Capital*, 3.
9. Hussain, *Rise and Decline Ruhela Chieftaincies*, 1–3.
10. *Khān*, *Hayāt i Afghāni*, 201.
11. Hussain, *Rise and Decline Ruhela Chieftaincies*, 7.
12. *Khān*, *Akḥbār uṣ-ṣanādeed*, 2:496–524.

13. Ibid., 2:503–504.
14. Ibid., 2:609.
15. K̤hān, *Ak̤hbār uṣ-ṣanādeed*, 1:717–25.
16. K̤hān, *Ak̤hbār uṣ-ṣanādeed*, 2:510–12.
17. Ferguson, *Accounting for Taste*, 19.
18. Ibid.
19. *Risāla dar tarkēb taʿām*.
20. The Rampur State Library was relocated into the Durbar Hall and renamed Raza Library in 1957.
21. Ram, *Alwān e neʿmat*.
22. Ali, *Dastūr puk̤htan*.
23. Ali, *Kitāb lazzat taʿām*.
24. Husain, *The Mughal Feast*.
25. Bourdieu, *Distinction*.
26. As Pashto and, later, Hindko was the language of the Rohilla folk songs called chārbait which later started including Persian and Urdu words, one can conclude that the khansamas spoke a mixture of Hindi and Urdu at that time.
27. Bilgrami, *Mashahidat*, 112–113.
28. Narayanan, “Cultures of Food and Gastronomy,” 81–82.
29. Sharar, *Guzishtā Lak̤hnau*, 268–298.
30. *K̤hān e neʿmat*. A copy of the manuscript is preserved at Noor Microfilm Center, New Delhi.
31. Bulaqi, *Alwan e neʿmat*.
32. *Dastark̤hwān puk̤htan taʿām*.
33. *K̤hwan e neʿmat*. A copy of the manuscript is preserved at Noor Microfilm Center, New Delhi.
34. Narayanan, “Cultures of Food and Gastronomy,” 86–87.
35. *Nusk̤ha hai taʿām*.
36. Jān, *Musaddas e tahniyat e jashn*.
37. Ibid., 68–71.
38. K̤hān, *Haftk̤hwān shaukat*.
39. Ibid., 14–15.
40. The first Bengal cookbook Pākrajeshwar was published in 1831 republished in 1854. The Byanjan Ratnākar listed recipes for the royal classes much like Haftk̤hwān shaukat. The Pākprbandha, published in 1879 which was focused on women who were supposed to look after the cooking and health of the family. Pāk Pranāli (published 1893 onwards) was also aimed at the female reader with special emphasis on health concerns.
41. That Haftk̤hwān Shaukat’s intended audience was the male gourmand as is evident from the introduction as well as instructions on laying the dastark̤hwān for dinner for a guest followed by dance recital. The idea that the nobleman would instruct the k̤hānsāma directly or through the lady of the house.
42. Fiore, “Heritage and Food History,” 35–36.
43. Naccarato and LeBesco, *Culinary Capital*.
44. Rockower, “Recipes for Gastrodiplomacy.” See also Ichijo and Ranta, “Food National Identity and Nationalism..”
45. Fiore, “Heritage and Food History,” 35.
46. Oral history by Azhar Inayati, a popular poet of Rampur.
47. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 54.
48. K̤hursheed, *Hunarmandān e Rampur*, 125.
49. Bilgrami, *Mashahidat*, 112–113.
50. Ibid., 112.
51. Ibid., 113.
52. Ibid., 112–113.
53. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 55.

54. Habibullah, *Remembrance of Days Past*, 89–93.
55. Nawab Hamid was the patron of Aligarh Muslim University, an institution which was at the forefront of the movement for Muslim reform and education under the colonial rule.
56. Sayed Asghar Ali Shadani, *Ahwāl e riyāsāt e Rampur*, 180–181.
57. Habibullah, *Remembrance of Days Past*, 69.
58. *Ibid.*, 69.
59. The royal princesses were sent to schools in Mussoorie. My mother and aunt were sent to La Martinere Girls College for their schooling along with my uncles in the 1940s. These women became the first generation of college educated girls from Rampur.
60. Partha Chatterjee gives the concept of *ghaire bhaire* (the home and the world), where the west could be engaged with by the masculine outside world whereas the women in the homes would continue with the Eastern lifestyle.
61. The khansamas trained in English cuisine were called over to our kitchens to teach our khansamas. The male members of the household enjoyed the cuisine and it was considered healthier than Indian food. There was thus a filtered down entry of English and continental cuisine on the elite dining tables.
62. Pilcher, *Food in World History*, 120.
63. *Abu-l Fazl, A'in-i Akbari* 58–60.
64. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 85.
65. *Annual Administrative Report of Rampur*, 11.
66. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 55.
67. Calculated at median CPI inflation in India at 8%. Value of Rs 1 in 1947 = $Rs\ 1 * (1-8\%)^{70}$ = Rs 0.003 in 2017.
68. *Ḳhān, Akḥbār uṣ-ṣanādeed*, 2:455.
69. For some reason there was no Block B in the palace.
70. The ruins of these servant quarters can still be found near the kitchens. Majid khansama says that he as well as some other khansamas came to work from their homes but a few stayed in the quarters.
71. Khursheed, *Hunarmandān e Rampur*, 123–128.
72. He was not officiating at that time but claims to have seen the kitchens. Similar oral history was narrated by Mujahid Yar Khan, the current administrator of the college.
73. Titley, *The Nīmatnama Manuscript*, has several facsimile paintings of the Sultan seated with the cooks seated on the floor working on wood fired *chulhas*, chopping meat, etc., and serving dishes.
74. Leong-Salobir, *Food and Culture in Asia*, 60–86.
75. *Ibid.*, 62.
76. Majid khansama speaks of Sakina Begum, wife of Nawab Murtaza, setting out the menu for the day with the Munsarim. Begum Noor Bano, daughter in law of Nawab Raza Ali Khan says that her mother in law, Raffat Begum, and Nawab Raza instructed the munsarim.
77. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 193.
78. Khan, *Tāreeḳh Rāmpur (1930–1949)*, 56.
79. *Ḳhān, Akḥbār uṣ-ṣanādeed*, 2:508–510.
80. *Haft Khwān shaukat*, 412–416.
81. The Machhi Bhavan palace is now Khursheed Girls School and still has the remnants of the wallpaper and woodwork.
82. Oral History narrated by Dr Hafeez *Ḳhān*, grandson of Dr Abdurrahēm *Ḳhān*, court physician.
83. Shadani, *Ahwāl e riyāsāt e Rampur*, 180.
84. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 42.
85. *Ibid.*, 55.
86. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 52.
87. Jahan, *Durbār e Rampur*.
88. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 49.
89. Jhala, “Cosmopolitan Kitchens,” 81–117.

90. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 31–32.
91. Oral history narrated by Ameer Ahmad Khan, Chief Secretary to Nawab Raza and Nawab Murtaza, to his grandson. Ameer Ahmad Khan lived intermittently at Khas Bagh palace from 1950s till 1980s and overlooked the affairs of the estate.
92. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 34.
93. *Nuskha hai ta'am*.
94. Khursheed, *Hunarmandān e Rampur*.
95. Mehrunnisa, *An Extraordinary Life*, 53–54.
96. *Ibid.*, 54–55.
97. *Ibid.*, 55–56.
98. Kḥān, *Rampur kā shāhi dastarkhḥwān*, 1954.
99. Nazli, *Ismati dastarkhḥwān*, 11.
100. Khursheed, *Hunarmandān e Rampur*, ش.
101. Rampur Digest, Vol 1, Issue 2, 1 November 1962, 3.
102. Khursheed, *Hunarmandān e Rampur*, 123–128.
103. The “wily” khansama with a secret pudiya (pouch) filled with secret spices was a general perception. The khansamas were said to keep some secret spices which they would add right at the end and earned high praise. The contents of the secret pouch were never revealed by the khansama.
104. Anglicized pronunciation of the Hindi term *Bada khāna*, which in the time of British Raj, referred to a formal dinner or feast where dignitaries and high-ranking officials were invited.
105. Shamsi, “My mother’s Rampur memoir.”
106. Kḥān, *Shahi Dastarkhḥwān*, 46–47.
107. “Princess of Rampur Spills Her Secrets.”
108. Ali, “Dining with the Nawabs.”
109. “Cooking with Royalty.”
110. Habibullah, *Remembrance of Days Past*, 89–93.
111. “Sutton, Food and the Senses,” 215.
112. Srinivas, “Everyday Exotic,” 5.

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