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INTRODUCTION
Global Food History Special Issue 9.2

FORGOTTEN FOOD HISTORIES OF SOUTH ASIA
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FORGOTTEN FOOD: CULINARY MEMORY, LOCAL HERITAGE AND LOST AGRICULTURAL VARIETIES IN INDIA (2019-2023)

Heritage food is a boom industry in India and Pakistan today. Five-star hotels and fashionable restaurants tout menus replete with "lost recipes" and "gastronomic traditions," while colonial-era eateries – Karim's in Delhi being one of the most famous – turn their history into franchise. Food festivals, too, from Lahore to Chennai bring historic flavours to a general public hungry for dishes with provenance. For those wanting to bring home "centuries old food traditions," bookstores stock a colourful array of cookbooks selling South Asian cuisine through the prism of kitchen stories or a royal banquet. To make or complement those recipes, handy online providers and trendy grocers alike market heirloom food products: from Sempulam Sustainable Solutions' "traditional organic rice" to Bengalaru-based Loafer & Co's "local grain, global bread" made with "ancient" grains. Since the runaway success of "Raja, Rasoi aur Anya Kahaniyaan" ("Kings, Kitchens and Others' Stories") – heading for Season 5 in 2023 – Netflix has capitalized on this interest in "culinary traditions" to keep viewers hanging on for "more like this."[1] Vloggers and bloggers from Instagram to TikTok enrich their #foodporn with a spoonful of Wikihistory to win over subscribers and rack up the "likes."[2]

Yet, as journalist Sourish Bhattacharyya noted way back in 2015, much of the hype around India's "lost recipes" and "heritage cuisine" is little more than "a lot of chatter." "We need historians," he concluded, if practitioners aim to do more than "scratch the surface." [3] Bringing historians into partnership with practitioners – including heritage activists, writers, street vendors, performers, chefs and farmers – was at the core of the broader project out of which this special issue on "Forgotten Food Histories of South Asia" has emerged. In 2019, scholars and culinary experts from the United Kingdom, India, and Canada came together to frame an original program of publicly engaged research and global knowledge mobilization under the title: "Forgotten Food: Culinary Memory, Local Heritage and Lost Agricultural Varieties in India." This project successfully obtained funding from the Global Challenges Research Fund through the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom (2019-2023). The nature of that funding required the building of "fair and equitable partnerships"

[1] On "Raja, Rasoi aur Anya Kahaniyaan" see https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6953924/.
[2] This paragraph summarizes Siobhan Lambert-Hurley's opening column for Scroll's "'Forgotten Food' series"; There are additional references to Sempulam Sustainable Solutions (affiliated to Tamil Nadu-based social enterprise, the Centre for Indian Knowledge Solutions: https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/projects/feedingcity/2023/02/26/center-for-indian-knowledge-systems-ciks/) and to an innovative Bengalaru-based bakery "Loafer & Co." Tanya, "From Farm to Bakery: Loafer & Co is baking with heritage varieties of rice & wheat."
[3] Bhattacharyya, "Bringing ancient Mughal recipes."

with the aim of using academic research to "improve lives and opportunity" in line with the United Nations' sustainable development goals.[4] The team of food studies scholars, with close links to public history and community groups, believed that fostering an awareness of historic recipes and culinary heritage could tangibly contribute to social cohesion and the mediating of difference, especially at a time of heightened communal tensions and violence in India.[5]

A key question for the Forgotten Food research project was how and why assumed fixities in contemporary South Asia – as captured in nationalist and communal discourses especially – had evolved or varied historically in terms of dietary norms and culinary issues. Why did certain flavours, foodways and eating practices from South Asia get appropriated as "authentic" or "traditional" while others were forgotten? How did India come to be stereotyped as a vegetarian nation, despite convergent statistics in the present (which suggest that only 20% of Indians are vegetarian) and divergent practices in the past (with meat-eating linked to moral codes, religious power, social hierarchies and masculinity)? With Muslim communities experiencing a devastating assault on their food cultures in contemporary India, what were the specific historical trajectories that resulted in their gastronomic separatisms and amalgamations – whether real or imagined? How important was palate – incorporating not just taste, but also smell and other sensory responses – to such culinary constructions of self and other, identity and difference?

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL LENS: ACADEMIC FOOD WRITINGS ON SOUTH ASIA

Historically-engaged insights into food systems and food culture were seminal to classic works of scholarship on South Asia from the 1980s and 1990s. They ranged from a Nobel prize winning economist's writings on famine and social entitlements and a pioneering study of oceanic commodity circulation to a pathbreaking sociological essay capturing gastronomic cultures.[6] There gradually emerged an extensive body of historical literature that took to investigating the impact of British colonialism on food processes, governance and practices, as well as the historical optics of hunger.[7] Some historians of South Asia have argued that the historical study of South Asian foodways effectively arose at that time, within the scope of historical works on early modern commodities, modern consumption, and imperial governance.[8] However, this does not mean that those authors necessarily engaged with food history, or placed themselves in relation to the academic study of food as an discipline.

As a defined area of study where authors explicitly engage with the scholarly study of food, and bring it into dialogue with historical scholarship on South Asia, food history is a much

[4] On the UN's sustainable development goals, see https://sdgs.un.org/goals.
[5] For the "planned impact" and "impact summary" from the Forgotten Food project, see https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FT004401%2F1#/tabOverview.
[6] Sen, *Entitlement and Deprivation*; Bhatia, *Food Security in* Asia; Chaudhuri, *Trade in the Indian Ocean*; Appadurai, "Cookbooks in Contemporary India," 3–24.
[7] Worboys, "Discovery of Colonial Malnutrition," 208-255; Arnold, "Malnutrition and Diet in Colonial India," 1–26; Bose, "Famine in Bengal, Honan and Tonkin," 699–727; Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts*; Damodaran, "Famine in Bengal," 143–81; Amrith, "Welfare in India," 1010–35; Sherman, "Post-Colonial Nationalism in India," 571–88; Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*; Siegel, *Making of Modern India*; Simonow, "The Great Bengal Famine," 168–197.
[8] Berger, "Historicizing Food in India," 1; Fisher-Tiné, Hauser and Malhotra, "Feeding Bodies, Nurturing Identities," 107-164.

more recent field of study. Since the 2000s, a defined food history approach began to appear across a wide range of historical monographs. They included works that explored the cultural significance and global circulation of specific foods and drinks linked to South Asia, such as curry or tea or alcohol. An aim was to study colonial food sites such as plantations and kitchens in order to conduct explorations of consumption, production, trade, circulation, and changing social landscapes around food and foodways.[9] Scholars began to employ a lens of gastronomic politics to consider the symbolic values of food and drink to historical issues around socio-religious reform, Indian nationalism, and decolonisation, or to historicize how food intersected with the domestic through gendered discourses.[10] An array of historians, anthropologists and sociologists creatively examined how changing dietary norms and food circulation across and beyond South Asia acted as expressions of class, caste, gender, regional, religious, national, transnational, and diasporic identities.[11]

The coalescing of a dynamic food history approach to the study of South Asia from the 2000s took on an added resonance through connections to a wide range of literary, sociological, and anthropological scholars who contributed works on South Asian and diasporic foodways, especially as related to popular food practices and livelihoods.[12] Much of this scholarship arose out of global projects that adopted interdisciplinary approaches to their investigation of South Asian foodways. A pioneering initiative from the Centre for South Asian Studies at the University of London examined the cultural meanings of food through issues such as food and religion, food and the body, food and the diaspora, food and religion, and the commodification of food, in a broad South Asia context.[13] Subsequently, an international collaboration between New York University's Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health and the University of Toronto's Culinaria Research Centre birthed the City Food Research Team's global network of scholars, teachers, curators, public historians, and advocates. Between 2018-2023, this network produced key food studies of South Asian cities such as Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai, and of diasporic cities such as Toronto/Scarborough, Singapore, and London.[14] From Japan, an international food history collaboration with Indian scholars took the form of an ICSSR-JSPS research project on "Ideas of Food and Body in South Asia: Analyses of Cookbooks from the Medieval Times to the Present" (2016-2018). This resulted in a pioneering collection of bilingual Japanese-English articles on South Asia.[15] Such innovatively

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[9] Collingham, *Curry*; Sharma, *Empire's Garden*; Sharma, "Food and Empire,"; Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire;* Collingham, *The Hungry Empire*; McHugh, *The Unholy Brew.*

[10] See, as example: Hancock, "Home Science in Colonial India," 871–903; Sengupta, "Food in Colonial Bengal," 81–98.

[11] See, as example: Alter, *Politics of Nationalism*; Hancock, "Home Science in Colonial India," 871–903; Berger, "Between Digestion and Desire" 1622-1643; Ray, "Indian Ocean Cuisine?" 119–31; Slate, *Gandhi's Search for the Perfect Diet.*

[12] See, as example: Ray, *The Migrant's Table*; Srinivas, "'As Mother Made It," 91–221; Mannur, *Food in Diasporic Culture*; Roy, *Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial*; Ray and Srinivas, *Globalization, Food, and South Asia*; Ray, *The Ethnic Restaurateur*; Anjaria, *The Slow Boil;* Sanyal and Kumar, *Food, Faith and Gender*; Sen, Bhattacharyya, and Saberi eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Indian Cuisine.*

[13] Dwyer, "Cultural Meaning of Food, "5-7.

[14] See http://cityfoodresearch.org/. Some examples are: Baviskar, "Instant Noodles in India," 1–10; Bégin and Sharma, "Culinary Hub in Global City," 55–74; Ray, "Street-Food, Class, and Masculinity," 89–100; Ray, "Taste and Urban Transformation," 308–318; Baviskar, "Street Food and Survival," 142-155; Sharma, "Food Cries," 16-30; Sucharita. "Tomatoes in Indian Recipes," 1–12.

[15] Isaka and Yamanem, *India Depicted Through Food.*

interdisciplinary scholarship across the broad field of food studies complemented the rise of a strong body of social science scholarship on agri-food systems and nutrition policy especially as related to post-colonial South Asia.[16]

Several of the scholars involved in these projects to study South Asian foodways – located at universities across the world – were instrumental in the collaborative framing of the Forgotten Food global project. As this special issue reveals, the project team were deeply aware that much remained to be studied and written about South Asia's plural food histories, especially in terms of pre-modern, regional, and vernacular cultures and diets.

GLOBAL FOOD HISTORY: FORGOTTEN FOOD HISTORIES OF SOUTH ASIA

Since 2015, *Global Food History* has provided a broad forum for historical writings that engaged a wide array of linguistic and regional archives from across the world. It became the home for articles on South Asia's historical foodways not just from historians, but also from linguists, sociologists, and geographers. Their scholarship ranged from historical examinations of vernacular recipes, to the culinary and linguistic circulation of an Indian Ocean stew, from contemporary meat histories of Tamil Nadu, to the indigenous ecologies and diets of the sub-Himalayan borderlands of Bangladesh and northeast India.[17]

The authors of this Forgotten Food Histories special issue advance such explorations deep into the regional, early imperial, and vernacular culinary cultures of South Asia. In doing so, they reveal crucial insights, but also highlight continuing lacunas. Such insights resonate especially with regard to the food histories of Muslim communities, and the social and cultural histories of Indo-Persian culinary practices. Crucially, their writings demonstrate how so much of South Asia's vernacular food histories remains unexplored and unwritten beyond the excellent work conducted on the Bengali Hindu kitchen and its cuisines.[18] These five articles together make a considerable contribution to redressing one of the troubling lacunas in South Asia's food histories through attention to its long-neglected Urdu, Hindustani, Persian, and Hindi archives.[19] They show, too, how in regard to South Asia's imperial histories, there is a glaring dichotomy between the tiny body of research on Mughal food practices, gastronomic, sensory, and dietary norms as compared to the considerable scholarship on the British empire in South Asia.[20]

In "The Perfumed Palate," Neha Vermani explores how Mughal courtly elites regarded the incorporation of odoriferous substances into their food practices as an important ingredient to produce an ethical, healthy, and spiritually enlightened lifestyle. She argues that such perfumed

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[16] Chaturvedi, *Food Security in South Asia*; Hossain, "India's Food Security Act," 133–53; Glover and Poole, "Nutrition-Sensitive Food Systems," 63–73; Gillespie, van den Bold, and Hodge, "Agri-Food Systems in South Asia," 13–27; Deb, "(SRI) Consonant with Agroecology?" 1338–1369; Ray, "Remembering the Commons," 1–3; Deb, "Rice Cultures of Bengal," 91–101.

[17] Choudhury, "Bengali Cookbooks and the 'Ideal' Kitchen," 24–39; Bruckert, "Farm to Fingers," 135–37; Jhala, "Histories of Botany, Agriculture, and Food," 34–55; Hoogervorst, "Qaliyya," 106–27.

[18] An exception to this lack of concern is: Yamane, "Muslim Writers and Food," 18-32.

[19] For food history writing on Bengal, see Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India;* Also see her earlier articles: Ray, "The Body and Its Purity," 395–421; and Ray, "Eating "Modernity," 703–30. Also relevant is the following work on breastfeeding: Saha, "Milk, 'Race' and Nation," 97–100. On the "Hindi belt," see Mishra, *Beastly Encounters of the Raj* esp. ch. 5: "Food Adulteration, Public Health"; Berger, "Ghee in Interwar India," 1004–26.

[20] On Mughal food practices and dietary norms, also see Vermani, "Food Practices of Mughal Elites"; and Tandon, "Gastronomy, Household and State Formation," 4-17.

palates and fragrant dining spaces were crucial to Mughal imperial self-fashioning as civilized, healthy, and spiritual gentlemen gracing the royal courts of early modern South Asia.[21]

Jayanta Sengupta considers Indo-Persianate food cultures in his "Exploring 'Bengali Muslim Platter on the Table," both in terms of the materiality of food consumption, and the discursive processes around such a culinary heritage. Constitutive factors to how Bengali Muslim "heritage foodways" have been interpreted are the relatively late incursion of Indo-Persian cuisines into Bengal, their interactions with local foodways deeply rooted in the region's human geography and ecological histories, successive political Partitions between 1947-1971, and finally the intertwining of Bengal's city histories and food, especially as related to the Indian city of Kolkata (formerly, Calcutta).[22]

Tarana Husain Khan's article, "Narrating Rampur's Cuisine: Cookbooks, Forgotten Foods and Culinary Memories," draws on archival sources preserved at the Rampur Raza Library, as well as historical records and gastronomic memory of culinary practitioners and their aristocratic patrons in Rampur, a former princely state of north India. She follows the trajectory of a place-based cuisine, addressing the grand sweep of amalgamation and improvisation of the Delhi and Lucknow cuisines into a distinctly Pakhtun foodway and the adaption and textualization of this new 'haute' Rampur cuisine by its Nawab rulers and the nobility.[23]

Saumya Gupta interrogates the culinary advice dispensed in Hindi cookbooks in colonial India to explore the social world and cultural norms of urban middle-class Hindu families in the early twentieth century in her article, "Culinary Codes for an Emergent Nation: Prescriptions from Pak Chandrika, 1926." She examines how the cultural and social practices prescribed in Hindi cookbooks of this era signal how a monolithic Hindu culinary identity became part of a pedagogic diet of nationalistic values, one that prescribed what an ideal nation should be and what it should eat.[24]

Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, in "Human or not, everyone has their own habits and tastes," examines how identity and difference in Muslim South Asia are expressed through food. She reads travel texts by female authors to show how food was used at different historical moments and locations to differentiate between, not just Hindus and Muslims, but also between colonizers and colonized, men and women, old nobilities, a new middle class and 'the poor,' and between Muslims of different regions and locales.[25]

PUBLIC IMPACT: A FORGOTTEN FOOD GLOBAL PROJECT

Since 2020, an important intervention from the Forgotten Food project team has been the creation of a wide array of publicly accessible cultural, multi-media knowledge products, from a documentary film to anthologies, and from an online essay series to the performing arts. [26]

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[21] Vermani, "The Perfumed Palate," 1-23.
[22] Sengupta, "Food Culture in Bengal," 1-19.
[23] Khan, "Narrating Rampur's Cuisine," 1-25.
[24] Gupta, "Prescriptions from Pak Chandrika," 1-19; Also see Gupta, "Hindi Cookbooks in Colonial India."
[25] Lambert-Hurley, "Food in Muslim South Asia," 1-23.
[26] For the full listing of publications and outcomes from this project, see https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=AH%2FT004401%2F1#/tabOverview

Appearing under the byline of Forgotten Food, the team's essays for a major digital publication from India, *Scroll*, have become an important, public archive of food memories, activism and analysis.[27] The team's creative arts collaborations included a contemporary performance piece in New Delhi in 2022, based on flavourful *rekhti* poetry (a form of Urdu poetry that uses women's voices) featuring two female storytellers, or *dastango*.[28] A key cultural outcome was a documentary film "Dastarkhwan-e Rampur" or "A Feast in Rampur," that traced the cultural history of this former princely state through its living food and culinary heritage.[29] The project produced two published anthologies of creative food writing from Muslim South Asia and its diasporas, *Desi Delicacies* and *Forgotten Foods*, that capture the personal and sensory experiences of that culinary world in infinite variety.[30] A third anthology, *Eating like a Muslim*, will highlight the rich diversity of Muslim food practices documented through oral history interviews with migrant families in Delhi across different social, occupational and sectarian groupings.[31]

Alongside these cultural outputs have been field-to-table initiatives around tangible seeds, plants, dishes, and menus where the Forgotten Food team collaborated with scientists, chefs, and farmers. Key to the conception and implementation of the project was a rare interdisciplinary collaboration between historians, plant scientists, and seed conservation networks. Archival research and oral history had flagged the loss of specific rice varieties vital to Rampur's cultural milieu and historic foodways as a consequence of India's Green Revolution and, more recently, climate change. Facilitated by inspirational farmer Brinder Singh Sandhu at Benazir Farm near Rampur, the project undertook to resurrect two local varieties: the short-grained and intensely fragrant Tilak Chandan rice preferred when fresh for the universal Rampuri khichdi, and the equally aromatic, but long-grained Hans Raj rice previously used for Rampur-style pulao and its sweet rice zarda dish. Despite innumerable challenges – from finding those rare seeds and bolstering the soil against pest infestations, unseasonable rains, storage problems, and against a global COVID-19 pandemic – their harvests were realised in 2020 and 2022.[32] Taste-tests and menus became a feature of the project's public events in India and

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[27] Access the series at: https://scroll.in/topic/56278/forgotten-food

[28] For an article on this collaboration with a link to the experimental video, see Khan, "Pandemic collaboration across oceans." "The Incomparable Festival" (featuring Fouzia Dastango and Saneya) is also available on YouTube: https://youtu.be/Kz49Dik0ag8.

[29] A trailer of the documentary film "A Feast in Rampur," directed by Yousuf Khan is available here: https://youtu.be/npkm9vIqBLM. The film will soon be available for global audiences on the Sheffield Player digital platform from the University of Sheffield at: https://player.sheffield.ac.uk/

[30] Chambers ed., *Desi Delicacies*– also published in the UK as *Dastarkhwan*; Lambert-Hurley, Khan and Chambers eds., *Forgotten Foods*. Other written outputs included popular articles and books by individual members of the project team. Khan, *Degh to Dastarkhwan,* deserves special note.

[31] Yameen and Lambert-Hurley with illustrations by Anarya, *Eating like a Muslim*, forthcoming. The project gathered two other sets of oral interviews. The second, tagged the "People's Archive of Food Memories," involved a team of eleven students at Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, under the lead of the project's co-investigator Saumya Gupta, collecting interviews from their family memories on food practices, cultures and histories among migrant communities to Delhi. This research will feature in a planned article by Saumya Gupta and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley destined for *Migration Studies*. The third includes filmed interviews with members of Rampur's Nawabi family alongside other social and occupational groups by project consultant Tarana Husain Khan. As well as featuring in the project's documentary (see above), the full set will soon be accessible on the Sheffield Player at: https://player.sheffield.ac.uk/

[32] Khan, Cameron and Lambert-Hurley, "Resurrecting Tilak Chandan" for a special issue on "Agricultural Change and Food Heritage" in *Plants People Planet!*, forthcoming. For a more popular account, see Khan, "The Quest for

Britain, at which local *khansamas*, or chefs, working with the project team, recreated forgotten feasts from the Nawab of Rampur's court using rare recipe collections in Urdu and Persian manuscripts that had been preserved in the archive of the Rampur Raza Library. [33]

What has continued to underpin this impressively wide array of public activities over the multi-year duration of the Forgotten Food project – in a fulfilment of the ambition that motivated its global project team from the start – was a strong conviction of the scope and value of academic research on food history in South Asia. This is exemplified by this special issue of *Global Food History*, which heads toward publication just as this research project formally ends in 2023.

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Tilak Chandan" in Lambert-Hurley, Khan and Chambers' *Forgotten Foods*, ch. 23. Also, Yashee, "Saving Tilak Chandan's fragrance."

[33] To make these recipes and their culinary worlds available to a wider public, Tarana Husain Khan and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley are currently compiling a cookbook of historic Rampur cuisine with collaboration from local chefs/*khansamas* Aslam Khan and Suroor Khan, and with photography by documentary filmmaker Yousuf Saeed.

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