



Nashtayehwan

A Food Newsletter



A Government Girls' General Degree College, Ekbaldpore, Kolkata initiative
in collaboration with



**YOU ARE WELCOME
TO
Khana &
Kidderpore
A HERITAGE FOOD FEST**

ORGANIZED BY



**GOVERNMENT GIRLS'
GENERAL DEGREE COLLEGE,
EKBALPUR**

IN COLLABORATION WITH



**WEST BENGAL
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**INDIAN NATIONAL TRUST
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22ND NOVEMBER, 2022

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Messages

DR SYEDA SHARIQATUL MOULA ALQUADRI, PRINCIPAL

Food is the third most important thing for living beings after air and water. It also defines the socio-economic fabric of a particular region. Government Girls' General Degree College is located in Ekbalpur. The adjacent areas of our college (Kidderpore, Metiaburz, Alipur and Garden Reach) are famous for its rich culture and history - mini Lucknow of migrated Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and busy shipping hub of East India Company. Hence, these areas have varied social and cultural diversities. This socio-cultural diversity is still represented through gastronomical plurality of these areas. Few people of these localities have still nurtured and preserved their traditional cuisines. On World Heritage Week (19th November-25th November) Govt. Girls' General Degree College, Ekbalpore, is organizing a Heritage Food Fest, "Khana-e-Kidderpore" to showcase the Food Heritage of these areas. It is our pleasure to share with you some traditional cuisine and their recipes through this Newsletter especially those which are not so common anymore. I convey my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to West Bengal Heritage Commission, Heritage Education and Communication Service, INTACH, Know Your Neighbour and Break Free Trails for collaborating with us. I hope this fest would be a grand success.

DR. DEBAPRASAD BANERJEE, IQAC, CO-ORDINATOR & HOD, ENGLISH

"If music be the food of love
Play on"

This food image has been guiding us right from the days of Shakespeare. Food is an effective mode of communication. All senses are at play when we take food. Japanese people welcome everyone with tea. In an Indian village if a stranger is thirsty even a poor couple would welcome him with water and batasa. That shows the culture of those people and society. Even a poor and uneducated man may be very cultured. Our food habits reflect our culture. The Tibetan delights Momo and Thupka attract one and all. Who has not tasted Kathi kebab or Suti kebab at Zachariah street? Or Nehari in a wintry morning breakfast? Calcutta Biryani is so popular now that throughout Kolkata there are Biryani outlets. Cake, pastries, kachoris compete with puchkas, samosas and rolls. Who can resist the attraction for doi kachoris? Let us all celebrate the varieties of food items of Kidderpore in the ensuing festival.

DR. SAMPA SEN, T.C. SECRETARY & ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BENGALI

"ও নদি, তোমার পিঠে জিরোই একটুখানি
ভাগ করে খাবো বাখরখানি
পান্তা ভাতে দেব মিষ্টি তেঁতুলছড়া
শুধু লুকিয়ে রেখো তুমি তোমার চোখের পানি"

খিদিরপুর অঞ্চলের নানাবিধ খাবারের পসরা সাজিয়ে আমাদের অনুষ্ঠানের যে আয়োজন তা এই অঞ্চলের বহুমাত্রিক সভ্যতা, সংস্কৃতি এবং সম্প্রীতির প্রতীক। নানা প্রদেশ, জাতি, ধর্মের সমন্বয়ের সাক্ষী হিসেবে এই অঞ্চল কলকাতা শহরের এক অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ। অনেক সময় ব্রাত্য হবার যন্ত্রনা বুকে বয়ে নিয়ে চলা এই অঞ্চলের মানুষদের অকপট ভালোবাসা, অক্লান্ত সহযোগিতা এবং পরোপকারিতা আমরা কর্মস্থলে একাধিক বার অনুভব করি। আমাদের অবাক করে আমাদের ছাত্রীরা হাজির করে তাদের অপূর্ব হস্তশিল্প, বার্ষিক সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠানে তাদের নজিরবিহীন রন্ধনশৈলীর প্রমাণ আমরা পেয়েছি, দেখেছি ছাত্রীরা অনায়াসেই ভাগ করে নিতে পারে পান্তা ভাতের সঙ্গে বাখরখানি। এই অনুষ্ঠান তাই তাদের অঞ্চলের রন্ধনশৈলীর উদযাপন। এই কর্মকাণ্ডের সঙ্গে যে সমস্ত শিক্ষক-শিক্ষিকারা, ছাত্রীরা এবং এলাকার সাধারণ মানুষেরা যুক্ত আছেন, তাঁদের প্রতি আমার আন্তরিক কৃতজ্ঞতা এবং ভালোবাসা জানাই। আসুন, আমরা হাত পেতে নিয়ে চেটে পুটে খাই খিদিরপুরের খাবার-দাবার। আর রন্ধন শিল্পের উৎসবের মধ্যে দিয়ে উদযাপন করি সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্যের হারিয়ে যাওয়া ঐকতান।

Khana-e-Kidderpore

In *A Taste of Time: A Food History of Calcutta* (2021), “Food,” says Mohona Kanjilal, “has always been an integral part of the lifestyle of the residents of Calcutta... whether it is... the phuchka wallah...the jhal muri wallah, selling the spicy puffed rice preparation... or the ghugni wallah serving... the semi-dry and spicy preparation of whole yellow peas...”. Indeed, Food, as a prominent marker of one’s culture, defines the socio-economic fabric of a particular region. As a trading post for the East India Company, the city of Kolkata saw a huge influx of communities and their accompanying culture and cuisine from around mid- eighteenth century. Resultantly enough, Khidirpur or the anglicized Kidderpore area – comprising of Kidderpore, Mominpur, Ekbalpore along with its suburban extension Metiaburz – became a hub of shipping activity and a base for migrant population from the northern plains who were attracted by the ever increasing maritime trade that later got institutionalized into the Calcutta Port Trust in 1870. Moreover, in the adjacent Alipore and Garden Reach areas affluent Company employees and local Rajahs and Rai Bahadurs set up palatial garden houses. The migrant King, Nawab Wajid Ali will later go on to create ‘ek doosra Lucknow’ in one of these adjacent neighbourhoods, Metiaburz or what was originally Garden Reach. Along with Awadhi cuisine and fashion, this influx filled the Calcutta air with its distinct aroma and finer notes of Thumri and Kathak as well as contributed to its linguistic blend with both the delicate Hindusthani or Urdu ‘zubaan’ and the humble and rooted Awadhi and Bhojpuri. It is from this fusion of migrants from different parts of the country but mostly the north, having varied social and cultural identities, that the multifaceted culture of Kidderpore emerged. In other words, the linguistic diversity of the region could be traced in Bengali speaking Hindus and Muslims, Urdu/Hindi as well as Bhojpuri speaking Muslims and Hindus primarily from Purvanchal region (present eastern UP, Bihar Jharkhand), the English speaking Anglo- Indian and other communities, a sizeable south Indian diaspora and a small but distinct community of Odiya populace, reflected in celebration of an age old Rath mela, establishment of an Oriya school and a Jagannath temple in the area. The socio-cultural-linguistic diversity can be best traced in the gastronomically diverse, rich culinary heritage which is preserved and nurtured by the locality even today. From Pice Hotels selling multifarious traditional Bengali food to Awadhi kebabs, biryanis and pulaos, from traditional Bengali sweets to halwa puri and mawa laddu, from fish fry to bakharkhani and nan khatai, from litti chokha to dal vada and german bread, Kidderpore area has now developed as a culinary basket of south-western Kolkata, an area marked by gastronomical delights.

Khana-e-Kidderpore: A Heritage Food Festival of Government Girls’ General Degree College, located in the Kidderpore area, in collaboration with West Bengal Heritage Commission, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, New Delhi, Know Your Neighbour (an association of SNAP) and Break Free Trails, intends to demonstrate the rich and varied culinary heritage of this region; the food fest is a celebration of the gastronomical plurality of the region as it showcases the influence of Awadhi and Bihari cuisine from northern Indian plains, local Bengali cuisine, presence of Anglo-Indian cuisine and South Indian cuisine on the overall foodscape of not just Kidderpore but of Kolkata itself. These diverse cuisines, not only focusses on the rich intangible heritage of the area but at the same time also highlights the social diversity, which is often overshadowed by stereotypical mindsets nurtured through preconceived notions. Moreover, through this event, the College is attempting to create scopes of sustainability for some of the oldest food and catering enterprises (most still family run) by inviting eateries to participate as Pop-Ups and display their best fare to what we believe should be a sizeable audience from a varied academic as well as social Kolkata diaspora. In this way the event looks forward to contributing to the social outreach programme which is a seminal part of any Institution of Higher Education. Along with tremendous encouragement from the Principal, IQAC Coordinator and TCS of the College, active participation of Food Fest Committee members, students, conscious citizens of the neighbourhood, photographers and designers, this Food Newsletter is the first ever printed food documentation by any academic institution in this neighbourhood. It must be noted that this Food Newsletter, ‘Dastarkhwan’ is a humble attempt by the College to document some of the important eateries and signature food items of Kidderpore area. Literally speaking, a dastarkhwan is a piece of cloth on which food is laid out to be shared by a group or family members. It may include an elaborate spread of dishes comprising of kebabs, pulao, variety of rotis, qorma and desserts or something very humble such as daal-chawal-sabzi! However, in relative terms the word is often used to refer to a full meal spread similar in ethos to perhaps a Kashmiri Wazwan. While this Food Newsletter encompasses a variety of food items that are still found in Kidderpore area, it also lays bare items and eateries that are gradually waning away, which, if not properly taken care of, might empty the dining table leaving only a bare cloth for the posterity.

Dr. Antara Mukherjee

Assistant Prof. of English
&

Convenor, Heritage Food Festival.

Kissa-e-Kidderpore

Some say the place got its name from the locals trying to mimic the Company walahs when they passed by and asked of the port. Kidder port? They also say it is named after a certain Captain Kyde who was a naval engineer in the Company and got the lock gates of the port built. A very small set of people believe that it is a corruption of the master tailor's name Khaider Ali, who had the largest contract of Company soldier uniforms and tram-loads of stitched materials were shipped from his shop tucked away in a lane here. Lastly, it could very well be a direct relation to the Muslim patron Saint Khizr or Khidr who apart from being a mystical figure with vast knowledge and wisdom is also regarded as the guarding spirit of the waters - Seas, rivers and streams!

Down the road from Esplanade, the one with the tram-line that skirts around the great Maidan for most of its length and beyond the steel bridge over the Adi Ganga, lies a part of Calcutta, which, despite having a significant role in its history, is seen as a backyard and often as an afterthought to the city. Kidderpore or Khidirpur, depending on which story you end up believing in, has only grown ever since the first brick walls were raised up north by English settlers in the 17th century. What was once a patch of green caressing the river was turned into a trading hub with ships from all around the world converging on its muddy banks. Its importance can be gauged by the fact that the British went on to build India's first modern riverine port here and which is still functioning albeit down to only a few ships a year now. Also known as the Port area ever since, this place has witnessed migrations and movement of people from almost all corners of this vast country of ours. Its multicultural face is seen in a mix of mosques, churches and temples all standing tall in perfect harmony. Apart from main chunk of migrants from the northern plains, so called Hindustanis and Biharis, the area was once home to a sizeable Anglo-Indian community as well. Not to forget the many Malayalis, Tamils, Telegu and Odiya communities also. All in all, it provided a motley bag of cultures.

And with the culture came the food!

Amongst the many cultures that found a home here in the last 200 odd years, one that stands out predominantly is of the Awadh region. An erstwhile royal state which in its heydays was considered as rich as Bengal and which held the undisputed title of being the most exotic of all! It is with this region we can relate most of the food being offered today as Mughlai cuisine of Calcutta. Same goes for Kidderpore too. We all know about how the last king of Awadh lived his final days here in the city (a suburb just outside of Kidderpore proper) and due to this the influx of migrants increased manifold sometime after mid nineteenth century. But it is not just the food that we must reflect upon and celebrate today. For the vast plains between the two great rivers of our country, Ganga and Yamuna, helped established the very ethos that later gave birth to the Idea of India. Syncretism and tolerance. Today we have given it a name - the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb.

The region of Awadh after the early 18th century got its first proper ruler in the form of Burhan-al-Mulk Sa'adat Ali Khan. Prior to this it was managed as a territory by Mughal generals and administrative officers. But by now the Mughal or should we say Delhi kingdom had lost most of its sheen and therefore the vassal states began to exercise more autonomy and ultimately ran as an independent state. Right from the first Nawab, Awadh was run by generations of family that owed its ancestry to Iran and were purely Shia Muslims. This set it apart from the other Muslim ruled kingdoms operating in India back then. The region had always been passionate about ancient traditions and customs and it was this culture that the rulers adopted to wholeheartedly. Not just allowing it to continue but actively participating in and pro-



The 3rd Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula (foreground) with his son and the future Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula during whose reign Awadh reached its greatest heights. It was him who commissioned the now iconic structures of Lucknow including the Bara Imambara and Asafi mosque. Built to provide livelihood during a devastating famine, the Bara Imambara project is perhaps one of the first instances of State sponsored income creation scheme and public infrastructure policy. A step that is still referred by modern reformist cum socialist economic policy makers.

moting a multi-cultural celebration of its history and heritage. The rulers of Awadh also turned out to be true connoisseurs of art and music. So much so that their patronage not just attracted the best of talents from across the country but also gave birth to newer art forms. Both original and derived. Peace loving (they never invaded another territory or kingdom) and artistic, they were also economically sound and efficient with finances. It is because of this very reason that the Company devised plans after plans to gain a share for themselves ultimately taking over the state.

It was to this long line of excellent patrons of fine art and food that the great Wajid Ali was born and who himself took charge just before mid-1800s. Here was a king who had never seen a war, never had to struggle to feed his people, never had to bother about others planning to dethrone him and therefore had all the time for his passion and first love. Music and poetry. It wouldn't be wrong to suggest that had he not been a king, he'd be remembered today as a classical artist of the highest order. Wajid Ali, who is said to have never missed a mandatory salah or prayer, was not just an excellent dancer and singer but an equally terrific poet, writing in his nom de plume Akhtar.

He not only directed and acted in elaborate musical plays called Rahas but was also instrumental in the survival and growth of the traditional dance/singing art form of Kathak and Thumri. Trained by the best masters of the time (ancestors of Birju Maharaj) Wajid Ali made enough contributions to the school of art that can be taken as revolutionary by modern standards. Last but not the least, what was also very close to his heart and the hearts of other Awadh kings, was food. The Awadh kitchens were never dull. It was a matter of immense pride to be part of one. It was almost an achievement to head one. The Khansamas and Bawarchis had the audacity and permission to refuse food to their kings while also been given a free hand in experimenting and coming up with new recipes when they wanted to. This gave birth to the now legendary cuisine of Awadh.



*Abul Mansoor Sikandar Jah or Nawab Wajid Ali Shah.
Badshah-e-Adil, Qaiser-e-Zaman, Sultan-e-Alam.*



The inner façade cum portico of Sibtainabad Imambara or Shahi Imambara of Metiabruz. Commissioned by Wajid Ali Shah, this is the grandest of all existing structures from his time here and his final resting place.

One can go on about the significance and beautiful legacy of this culture, but we only have enough space here. Hence, we all hope and wish that our small attempt at acknowledging this legacy brings fruit and finds the recognition it deserves.

Shaikh Sohailuddin
Co-Founder, Break Free Trails.

Shahi Pakwan from Kidderpore

Kidderpore area is chiefly noted for its Awadhi cuisine. From Kolkata Biryani to Kebabs, from Qorma to Nihari, from the Paratha to Bakharkhani, from Firni to Shahi Tukra - Awadhi Khana in Kidderpore has always been 'lazeez'. When the last Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah tried to reconstruct a miniature Lucknow in Metiaburj, Kolkata (around 5 kms down river) he also tried to bring exotic dishes from the royal kitchen of Lucknow in his Kolkata set up. The Awadhi Dum Biryani or the Yakhni Pulao can easily be termed as the most popular royal dish from their kitchen today. It is a rice dish in which rice and meat are cooked separately and then layered and cooked again for several hours in a sealed vessel over a low fire. The revolutionary change that could be noticed in its Kolkata version was the inclusion of Potato in it. There could be various factors that made this happen. From early 16th century, potatoes, chillies and tomatoes were introduced in India by the Portuguese. Potatoes were first cultivated in Surat before spreading out to different parts of the country and it was 18th century Bengal where it truly found an audience as it was patronized by the English settlers. At that time due to low cultivation, potatoes were less available and hence were considered as a luxury item specially for the common people. However, the inclusion of the potato was a historic twist to the Awadhi pulao or biryani. The Awadhi biryani and the Yakhni pulao like most biryanis is cooked in dum-pukht style where the lid is sealed over the pot (so that the steam doesn't go out) and left over a low fire for several hours. The word 'dum' means to breathe in and 'pukht' means to cook. Thus, the technique of dum-pukht means allowing the food to breathe its own aroma which gets infused with the ingredients. Since the fragrance and juices of the spices and meat, potato, saffron etc all get absorbed in the rice, it tastes delicious. **Sheesh Mahal** is one of the oldest restaurants in Kidderpore that sells this biryani at an affordable rate. Though not strictly in Kidderpore but Manzilat Fatima, daughter of Dr. Kaukub Qadr Meerza, grandson of King Birjis Qadr, son of Jaan e Alam Wajid Ali Shah and Begam Hazrat Mahal, is successfully carrying forward the Royal Awadhi Tradition as she cooks and serves the Royal cuisine in her terrace restaurant, **Manzilat**, situated at Ruby, Kolkata. Her connection to Metiaburj continues as she often visits Sibtainabad



Dum Biryani

Imambara to pay homage to her royal ancestors.

Galawti Kebab said to be invented by a Haji Murad Ali, during the 18th century, in the Awadh capital Lucknow. Galawat literally means 'to melt'. The kebab became popular in the era of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah. Believed to have originated from a need to provide easy to chew meat for an aged Nawab, it is prepared by using extremely fine minced meat without any binding material. Other popular non-veg kebabs include the robust Kakori, humble Shami and Sheekh kebabs. Kebabs are often accompanied by rotis or breads which



Galawati Kebab

could of numerous types like ulta tawa paratha, dosti roti, sheermal, bakharkhani and rumali. Ulta tawa ka Paratha originated in Peshawar and then spread all over the former northern parts of India. It began as a wholesome meal often eaten at breakfast. Till now, Paratha is the main item along which different kinds of kebabs are served in Awadhi cuisine. There are many food joints chiefly noted for such items in Kidderpore area. The most famous of them all, **India Restaurant**, located near the Fancy Market in Kidderpore, is chiefly noted for its Galawti Kebab and the ulta tawa paratha.



Ulta Paratha

Dr Senjuti Gupta

Assistant Prof of Economics
&

Member, Heritage Food Festival.

Pice Hotels in Kidderpore Area

We all know about the legendary Pice hotels of Calcutta - humble no-frills eateries that have been serving regular and traditional Bengali homestyle dishes since decades. While most expect them to be around north Calcutta, one would be surprised to find them here in Kidderpore as well. Within 50 m from Mominpur Bus Stop a popular Pice hotel, **P.R. Chatterjee Hotel**, is located. The hotel was established during the British Period and was previously owned by an Oriya owner. Later, after Independence the grandfather of the present owners – Chandra Chatterjee and Mohan Chatterjee - took possession of the restaurant from the original Oriya owners. Since 1972, the hotel is being run successfully under the supervision of the two Chatterjee brothers. The restaurant is being named after their mother Parul Rani Chatterjee. At the very beginning, the restaurant used to offer only snacks and tea. However, at present it serves the local regulars, students from nearby educational institutes and other service men from nearby offices by providing Bengali meals at lunch and dinner times. The restaurant offers a rustic but decent seating arrangement for visitors and is quite popular in the locality for providing tasty meals at very reasonable rates. Misti Doi of the restaurant is very popular and the owners put tremendous efforts to satisfy their guests by offering a variety of new Bengali dishes every day. Popular dishes of the restaurant include shukto, pona macher jhol, chingri malaikari, begun shorshe, bhetki paturi, only to name a few. Guests feel the taste of food like their home which are prepared with utmost care and efforts by the cook Kashinath Baina. Presently the restaurant has 9 personnel to look after the daylong activities. The restaurant opens at 11.30 a.m. and lunch starts from 12.30 p.m. while the dinner is offered by the restaurant from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m.. The restaurant also intends to start home delivery in the near future to the local residents within 2 kms distance. Further to compete with other new and modern eateries nearby, the owners have started thinking of renovating the 70 years old property with all modern amenities for the guests so that they can dine in the restaurant with best possible comforts. One can only hope that in this renovation process the heritage value is not compromised.

Another very popular Pice hotel which bears the imprints of revolutionary Bengal is the **Young Bengal Hotel** located on Karl Marx Sarani very near to Kidderpore More. This is a 95 years old eatery which started during mid 1930s by a Tarapada Guha Roy. The eatery was initially launched to cater to the needs of the dockworkers by supplying meals at



Teachers and Students in front of Chatterjee Hotel



Chatterjee Brothers

a very nominal price. Though time has changed but the look of the restaurant has remained the same with a thatched roof and a worn –out signboard at the façade. Now managed and run with pure entrepreneurial spirit by descendent Pritha Ray Bardhan who in her 60s commutes almost daily from her Gariahat home and divides her time between family, business and her passion, singing! The regular dishes offered in the hotel includes purely Bengali dishes both vegetarian and non-vegetarian. Even today, the menu has remained identical to the one that Guha Roy had introduced and the prices have gone up nominally. A basic thali of the hotel includes rice, dal, jhuri aloo bha-ja, macher jhol and chatni which is still the supreme menu



Wall decor of Young Bengal

in the Bengali's heart. Apart from these staples, one can opt for special dishes like shukto – a medley of vegetables combined with bitter-gourd and bori, chanchra- a mishmash of vegetables and fish head curry, posto bora, dhokar dalna, fulkopir dalna, mochar dalna, konchur shaak, kanchkolar kopta etc. A hit item of the hotel in winter includes Pancharatna – a mishmash of winter vegetables cooked with moong dal. The non-vegetarian special dishes again include a fresh water fish like rui, katla, bata, bhetki, parshe etc. cooked in various medium of jhol, jhaal, paturi, kaliya as well as prawn delicacies like chingri macher malai curry. And to round off the meal chutney of various flavours by seasonal fruits are offered to guests like mango, tomato, pineapple, amra, raw papaya and lemon. Here all the food items are still today cooked on charcoal stove and all spices are prepared fresh every day before cooking starts. The homely food is served on a banana leaf with lemon, green chilli and some cut onions. Water is served in bhanr (earthen pot) – a tradition that has not changed since the early 20th C. The restaurant gets open at 11 a.m. and lunch starts from 12 p.m. The eatery remains



In an interview with owner Pritha Ray Bardhan and manager Sibani Mandal

open till 11 p.m. at night. So to taste authentic Bengali home-cooked food one must certainly walk into this **Young Bengal Hotel** to discover the taste of Bengali delicious items cooked long back by our grannies in their kitchen.

Dr. Rajashree Dasgupta

Assistant Prof. of Geography
&

Treasurer, Heritage Food Festival.

Snacks of Kidderpore

The tea-time ritual was probably inspired by the British custom of high tea, but the popular Bengali snacks of Kidderpore are the same as in any Indian city albeit with a local twist. Once such popular spot famous for the typical Kochuri, Singara is **Kanai Tea & Snacks**. Kachori or as in Bengali we say Kochuri is a customary snack item. It's a stuffed patty made of wheat flour and deep-fried in oil or ghee. Kachoris of different regions vary with what is inside those delicacies. While in Kidderpore the stuffing mainly consists of dals or lentils. Bengali Singara recipe aka Bengali Samosa is an epic savoury snack of Kolkata which is sold in every corner of Kidderpore. It is considered as one of the most popular vegetarian Bengali snacks. It is a no onion no garlic recipe and is hence one of the highly demanding snack recipes during meatless days. In this preparation, potato is cooked with peas and homemade bhaja masala along with a few spices and peanuts and is then stuffed in all-purpose flour dough cones and tucked carefully. Then it is deep fried slowly till crispy golden brown. It is always served hot as a snack with chutneys and green chilli pickles.

Fish fry at **Panchu Babur Dokan** in Kidderpore in southwest Kolkata, more than 80 years old, is yet another famous snack item of the locality. **Panchu Babur Dokan** was established in 1940. Located at a bend on the Diamond



Fish fry and other delicacies

Harbour Road very near to Kidderpore market, the snack and tea shop — the tea is made with leaves and not powder tea and is well-known for its flavour — is a local landmark, not only for the food, but also for what the food did. “Our father Mrityunjoy Mukhopadhyay started the shop,” says Apurba Mukherjee, 71, a gentle, smiling man who sits at the counter. His father was known as Panchu Babu, and that gave this eatery its name. A healthy breakfast of boiled eggs, toast and tea is available from 7am to 11am. 3pm to 8pm, Fish, Chicken and all preparations of Mutton are available. The six-foot-by-ten-foot colourful Panchu babu shop also serves Chicken Stew along with Fish Fry, Fish Kabiraji, Mutton Breast Cutlet, Mutton Kasha, Fish Diamond Fry, Prawn Kabiraji. The menu and prices of the food are hanging on the windows on both sides of the shop. The list is written in seasoned ink. The price is not. As time goes on, the price on the side of which is erased, it must be understood that it has run out. That’s right. There is no room to pester the shopkeeper about whether it will be available, how much it will cost, etc. The seating area is a covered terrace in front of the shop, and a couple of rocks nearby. You can have the superhit special ‘Pata Cha’. You can’t find such delicious and satisfying tea anywhere else. “At that time, Kidderpore and Garden Reach were crowded. Three shifts used to be in big factories. At that time there were not so many fastfood shops in Kolkata.” - says Panchu babu’s elder son Apurba Mukherjee. After the death of his father, since 1988, Apurba babu has been running this shop with the help of his younger brother. Many Calcutta residents could not avoid this attraction near the entrance of the mandap to see the Pandal of 25 Pally.

Pyaare kebab from **Zaika Kebab Centre** is yet another popular snack which has gained immense fan following over the last decade or so. In fact an Indian parties snack platter is incomplete without this delicious appetizer. **Zaika kebab centre** although relatively new has made a name for itself for all the right reasons. Located on Dent Mission road, Kidder-



Sabir Ahamed interviewing Apurba Mukherjee.

pore, Kolkata 23, any evening after 5 p.m. you can find marvellous kebabs being baked right in front on the authentic charcoal fire open top oven called sigree. This in fact is the authentic technique being used in Awadhi cuisine for its kebabs for centuries and not Tandoor which is basically a North-West Frontier/Punjabi import. The special dishes served are - Malai tikka, Haryali chicken, Afghani chicken, Spicy leg, Chicken tandoori, Peswari, Khiri kebab, Chicken wings etc. On enquiry they informed us that they prepare the Kebab by heating the oven around 375F-205C. The main ingredients used are chicken keema, 1tbsp vinegar, 2tbsp Fenugreek leaves, chopped, 1/2 tsp ginger and garlic paste, 1/2



Pyare Kebab at Zaika Kebab Centre

salt, 1/2 black pepper, 2 tbsp coriander leaves (chopped), 1 tbsp green chillies (chopped), garam masala- dalchini, kebabchini, elachi, long, jeera, javitri, jaifal, besan/sattu, Chat masala, onion wings and lemon wedges. In a large bowl chicken keema is mixed with few tbsp of vinegar, Fenugreek leaves, then ginger and garlic paste, salt and garam masala, chopped coriander leaves, chopped green chillies are added. The mixture is refrigerated for at least five hours before baking it on charcoal. No wonder Pyaare kebab is one of the hot favourite snacks of Kidderpore.

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Sweets of Kidderpore

Sharing sweets among one another signifies love and celebration. Sweet taste gives a sense of happiness and satisfaction for most of us. Sweet signifies good omen and prosperity and without it no festival can be completed. India has had a long and rich tradition of sweet or mithai which have a boundless significance in the Indian Culture. In Kidderpore Area Imarti is a popular sweet which is also known as Amriti. It is a mouth-watering sweet loved by everyone. It is made by deep frying urad flour batter in a kind of circular flower shape soaked in sugar syrup. Located on 29/1 Ekbalpore lane, **Bakshi Sweets** is a very famous and old heritage shop. It is mainly famous for delicious Amriti and Halwa Paratha. This shop is holding its charisma for over 100 years serving some delicious and mouth-watering sweets. I had a chance to interview Md Aslam from the shop.

Nazifa: what is your name?

Md Aslam: My name is Md Aslam.

N: Is this your shop?

MA: yes

N: How many years old?

MD: This shop is more than 100 years old shop. It was started by my grandfather and later was run by my father Md Ismail.

N: Which are the popular sweets?

MA: Amriti and Halwa Puri

N: What else?

MA: Apart from Amriti we make Samosa, Bhaji paratha, Suji paratha, Halwa paratha.

N: What is the procedure of Amriti?

MA: At first soaked urad dal for 2 hours. After that strain the excess water from it, grind it to make a smooth paste. Pour the dal in a large bowl, add the rice flour and food colour. Mix the batter with hand for 2/3 minutes. Now boil water with sugar in a pan, add crushed cardamom seeds and few threads of saffron. Now fill the batter in a zip lock bag and draw circles over the oil. Dip the Amriti in the sugar syrup for 2/3 minutes and keep on a serving tray.

N: Thank You very Much.

Goja is a very famous Bengali sweet. It is mainly originated from old Bengal and Odisha . It is made of flour and ghee, deep fried and soaked in sugar syrup. **Mominsura** is a very old sweet shop famous for kachori and goja. It is famous for its delicious aromatic flavour of different kinds of sweet like peda, gulab jamun etc. I had a brief chat with Md Atif from the shop.

Nazifa: What is your name?

Md Atif: My name is Md Atif.

N: Is it your shop?

MA: No this is owned by someone else.

N: How many years old?

MA: This shop is more than 150 years old. It was first opened by MD Jahar.

N: What are the popular dishes?

MA: Kachodi and goja are the most popular dishes. Apart from this it is famous for peda, gulab jamun.

N : What is the procedure for making Goja ?

MA: Goja is a very simple dish. At first dough is made with maida ghee and little bit of soda. Then it is divided into equal portions and later it is deep fried in a pan until it turns crispy and brown. Next they are soaked in sugar syrup for sometime and after coating it is removed quickly.

I thanked the shopkeepers and walked towards Dent Mission Road for more sweet shops. There are so many sweet shops like **Haji Liyakat**, **Haji Allauddin** etc. **Haji Allauddin's** shop is known for its Mawa Laddu, the typical 'Muslim' sweet. Mawa Laddu is a sweet ball made with loads of Mawa and sweet boondis. The mawa added richness creaminess enhances the flavour of the laddu. Khoa cheese is an additional ingredient which



Amriti at Bakshi Sweets



Goja at Mominsura



Shaikh Sohailuddin in front of Haji Liyakat Shop

makes the laddu soft and aromatic. **Haji Allaiddin** sweets is one of the oldest and leading sweet shop in Kolkata. They are specialized in Aflatoon, halwa and mawa laddo. This legendary sweet shop has been serving delicious treats for generations and it's a favourite among locals and visitors alike. It has different varieties of sweets. Gulab jamun is the most famous sweet made here. It's main branch is in 56, St Phears lane, colootola, Kolkata-700073. It's special sweets are mango kala-kand, angeer delight, orange Muscat, badam aflatoon, battessa halwa, fruit barfi. Halwa puri is another unique traditional sweet dish served at happy occasions and celebrations. It is a combination loved by many and perhaps one of the oldest of sweet dishes. **Haji Liyaqat** is



Haji Allaiddin shop

one of the famous sweet shops in Kidderpore which is famous for halwa puri and samosa. The stuffing inside the Puri makes the food special and marvelous. This shop is 25 years old and its main branch is in Central Avenue. It is owned by Mr Haji Liyaqat. Other special dishes made here are bhaji Puri, meetha samosa etc.

Due to the royal lineage, this area also serves the best Firni and Shahi Tukra. Firni is a royal dish prepared during festivals and special occasions. It is a delicious creaming pudding where milk is simmered and thickened with ground rice paste. It is intensely flavoured with green cardamom and garnished with nuts. It also contains low fat and low sugar recipe and is perfect for the healthy people. Shahi Tukda is a very popular, classic royal dessert originated during the Mughal region. It is made with homemade ghee-fried bread slices soaked in rose cardamom sugar syrup topped with fragrant creamy rabdi and garnished with nuts. **India Restaurant** is one of the best places that serves mouth-watering and aromatic Shahi Tukra in Kidderpore. It has a fine dining seating arrangement with a good posh decor. The staffs are very humble and polite and the place is well sanitized and hygienic. It is located on 34, Karl Marx Sarani road, Kidderpore kol-700023. The procedures for making Firni and Shahi Tukra are given below:

Firni

1) Rinse ¼ cup basmati rice a couple of times in water. 2) Drain the water very well and let the rice grains dry on their own by spreading them on a tray/plate or you can even wipe the grains dry with a kitchen towel 3) When the rice grains are thoroughly dried, add them to a dry grinder, blender or coffee grinder or a mixer-grinder. 4) Grind until the consistency is coarse – resembling sooji (rava or fine semolina) or cornmeal or couscous. Set aside. Do not make a fine powder.



Firni of India Restaurant

5) Heat 1 litre of whole milk in a saucepan or kadai till it begins to boil. Whilst the milk is heating, take 1 tablespoon of warm milk in a small bowl and mix 12 to 15 saffron strands in it. Set aside. 6) When the milk begins boiling, add the ground rice. 7) Next add ½ cup sugar or as required and stir again. For an extra sweeter firni you can add about 2/3 to ¾ cup sugar. 8) Cook the ground rice granules on low heat. Keep on stirring often so that lumps do not form. Also, scrape the sides often and add it to the simmering milk. The milk thickens gradually as the rice granules get cooked. 9) When the rice granules are almost cooked, add the cardamom powder (6 to 7 green cardamom crushed and powdered in mortar-pestle) and the saffron infused milk. 10) Add 10 to 12 blanched sliced almonds and blanched 10 to 12 pistachios (chopped or slivered). Cook Firni for further 5 to 6 minutes until the rice is completely softened or until you get a creamy pudding-like consistency.

Shahi Tukra

Bread slices: Use white milk bread to make this royal dessert. Do not use any other type of bread like brown bread or multigrain bread. **Rabdi:** This is condensed or thickened milk. To make this you will need milk, sugar, green cardamom, saffron and dry fruits like cashew nuts, pistachios and almonds. **Sugar syrup:** To make sugar syrup, you need water sugar, rose water and green cardamom. **For garnish:** Additional dry fruits like almond, cashew nuts and pistachio slivers can be added. Rose petals can also be used for garnishing.

Next time you are in Kidderpore, muh meeta kar ke jana...!



Shahi tukra made by Manzilat Fatima

Only in Kidderpore



Fancy Haleem Stall

How can we not talk about Haleem (Daleem) when we are documenting food items in Kidderpore area? Originated in the Middle East, this savoury dish is a blessing to everyone's taste buds. A mixture of meat and lentils gives both strength and flavour to the dish. One such Eatery is **Fancy Haleem Stall**. It is located on Karl Marx Sarani Rd, Kidderpore, Kol-



Sheermal Paratha

23 (in front of Fancy market GP-3 building). Mostly we find Haleem only during the holy month of Ramadan but this stall sells Haleem throughout the year. This shop being five decades old, holds a historic significance and it has bonded well with the people of Kidderpore. **Fancy Haleem Stall** was established by Noor Mohommad and is currently owned by his son Mohammad Salim. They have a very authentic and healthy recipe which has remained unchanged over the years. The taste is just wow and the price is reasonable too– Rs 60 per plate.

Apart from the heavy and filling Haleem, we should also talk about another unique food from this place- Sheermal Paratha. Sheermal Paratha is a mildly sweet naan, made out of maida, leavened with yeast, baked in tandoor or oven. It's an Iranian dish which is made by mixing maida, sugar, and saffron with milk. It's cooked in tandoor or oven. It is extremely delicious to eat. Sheermals are generally popular in Hyderabad and in the Awadh region but in Kolkata it is a take-off from the traditional one and are more of the category of a paratha than sheermal. This exclusive item is prepared and dispatched to multiple sellers (most of them independent wanderer sellers who still roam around the neighbourhood with a basket on head lane by lane) in an unnamed bakery situated in 27, Ekbalpore road. However, the owners are not friendly enough to answer to basic queries. This unfriendliness, one fears, may lead to the complete disappearance of the item as it is impossible to document this heritage food item when one hears 'mat aao', 'mat call karo'!

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Losing the Race: Traditional Bakery Products of Kidderpore

About 78 years ago Kolkata was threatened by a Japanese bomber of the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force. On 20th December 1942, they bombarded Calcutta. To evade the destruction, an unplanned 'blackout' was announced, and citizens of Kolkata were asked to remain in dark after the evening. The restriction on their mobility was imposed, crippling their everyday activities. There was a relaxation of barely two hours for the citizens to collect essentials. Amidst the huge uncertainty of life, a local bakery called **K Ali Bakery** at Mominpore Road started producing German Bread. The bread was available for a short span during the relaxation time; the residents hurriedly fetched two or three pounds of bread for the evening and for the following day. With a sizeable Anglo-Indian population in the neighbourhood at that time, this freshly baked bread gained immense popularity during the crisis. Thus amidst a global crisis during the World War II, a local food with a global name was born.

Interestingly enough, the popularity of the bread continues even today; if you are late by ten minutes after 6.30 pm, you are going to be hugely disappointed. They bake about 20 pounds of bread every evening which are sold out in less than two hours. The bread is different from the normal bread available in the market. Like any normal bread, the outer part of the bread is a little harder and the inside part is very soft, but the ingredients used to bake make the bread tastier than any normal bread. Aside the flour, usage of milk and butter brings a different taste. The cost of one pound is Rs 28 and it serves as an evening snack for two-three people. Of late, there has been an extraordinary innovation in bread production, loaf and brown bread are also gaining popularity, yet German Bread is immensely popular in the Kidderpore neighbourhood. One caveat: there is no evidence about the origin of the bread – the actual date of production of the German Bread is based on information gathered from the locals by the author.

Another immensely popular bakery product from the same bakery is a type of flatbread called Bakharkhani. It is available every morning and the demand is specially high during the winter season. As part of "Know Your Neighbour"'s special event "Breakfast with Bakharkhnai", we tried to understand the origin of the famous flatbread; we discovered that it is also shrouded in mystery. The paucity of space will restrict us to present different interpretations, the origin is traced back to the triumph of love over rivalry. Madhuri Katti in 'Bakharkhani : An Ode to lost love', published in Live History India on 14th March, 2019, has beautifully summarised the legend associated with the unique item:

The story goes that Aga Bakar was first posted as a military commander in charge of the Chittagong district in present-day Bangladesh by Murshid Quli Khan. While serving as Diwan there, he became deeply enamoured of Khani Begum, a beautiful dancer from Arambagh near Dhaka. Unfortunately, theirs was a love destined to fail. A local kotwal or police chief, Jainul Khan, was also relentlessly pursuing Khani Begum. In what is akin to a Bollywood blockbuster plot, Aga Bakar once rescued Khani Begum from the 'clutches' of Jainul, only to fall into a trap hatched by Jainul and his police team. While Jainul escaped, people were led to believe that Aga Bakar and Khani Begum had killed him.

Despite the lack of evidence or a witness, Aga Bakar was arrested and produced in the court of Murshid Quli Khan, who was by then the Nawab of Bengal. Being a just ruler, the Nawab condemned Aga Bakar to death. Even though he had literally raised him, he sent Aga Bakar into the



German bread from K. Ali bakery



Bakharkhanis

cage of a hungry tiger to meet his deadly fate. But, in a dramatic turn of events, Aga Bakar killed the tiger and emerged a free man. Meanwhile, taking advantage of his absence, Jainul Khan kidnapped and killed Khani Begum before Aga Bakar could return. A devastated Aga Bakar settled in his jagirs in the parganas of Umedpur and Salimabad in Barisal district of present-day Bangladesh in 1742 CE, in an area that later came to be known as 'Bakarganj.

Under his rule, Bakarganj went on to become an important trading hub, visited by merchants from as far as Armenia and Persia. Apparently, it was at this time that Aga Bakar, who was fond of cooking, developed his own special flatbread or roti, which he named after the woman he loved – Khani Begum.

As discussed earlier, there is a different variants of Bakharkhani across the subcontinent, the variant available on Kidderpore resembles Sheermal paratha, very soft and a favourite for breakfast in the area.

Every afternoon, you could hear a voice at your doorstep, shouting Nan Khatai at Kidderpore locality for over 40 years. Unlike German Bread and Bakharkhani, Nan Khatai is also present elsewhere in other Indian cities. According to Wikipedia “ The word Nan Khatai is derived from the Persian word ‘naan’ meaning bread and ‘khatai’ from a Dari Persian word meaning biscuit”. Nan Khatai has been borrowed into the Burmese language as ‘nankahtaing’. The South Asian countries are artificially separated by partition, but still connected by the presence of food. Among such items, Nan Khatai figures prominently as one of the loved food items, are available in Lahore, Hyderabad, Mumabi, Kolakta



and Dhaka etc. While interviewing a couple of old bakeries as part of research on food in Kidderpore, we found a dozen of handmade biscuits which were popular and favourite staples even a few decades ago. The onset of machine-made bakery products is a big blow to these kinds of handmade biscuits. Amidst this threat from machine-made sophisticated confectionary items, Nan Khatai has survived because of its sheer taste and crispness.

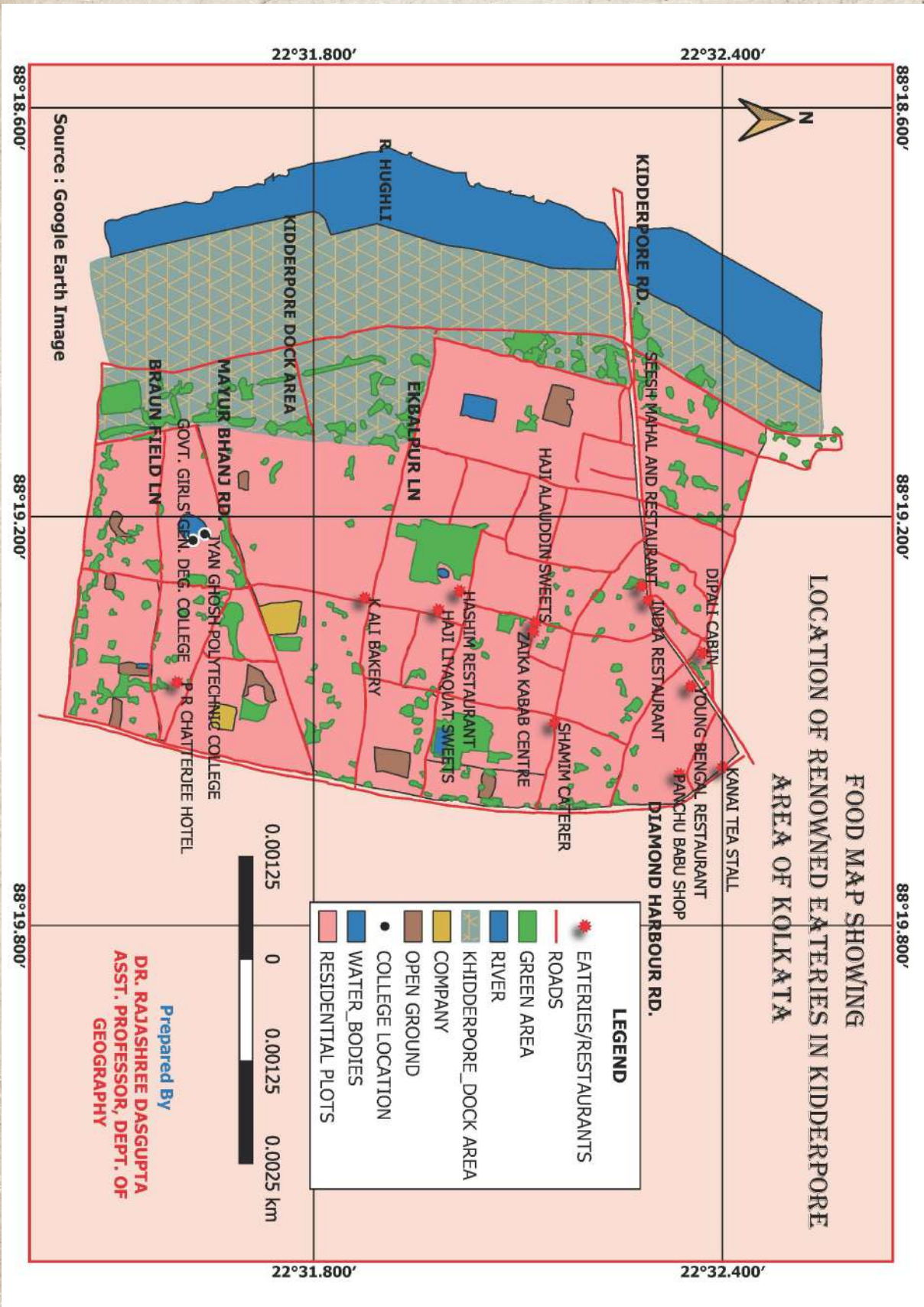
The concern is that now most of the bakeries in the area have stopped producing such traditional products because they could not compete with the challenges of machine-made confectionaries. The new bakery units invest a lot in packaging, sophistication in production, keeping hygiene on top priority, thus the traditional bakeries are losing the race. The traditional products maintain the authentic taste as much as possible because people involved with the production are associated with these bakeries for generations; but now when their skills and techniques are handed over to new generation, they show little interest in the traditional items. This calls for urgent attention from researchers, policymakers and civil society organizations. The culture of food is also an integral part of intangible heritage and needs to be preserved by systematic policy intervention and academic endeavours. Since many traditional food items from this area are fast disappearing, one feels the urgency of documenting different aspects of these exclusive items - the stories, people, recipes, procedures etc

associated with these food items. It is of seminal importance that to rejuvenate traditional bakery products, Government should come up with economic packages like support to the workers with hygiene training, and marketing of their products etc. Civil society organizations could also take up host of activities to promote traditional bakery products including livelihood support for the workers, conducting food walks and thereby introducing these products to larger communities, and setting up food enterprises around these traditional food products. Only then, one hopes, the traditional bakery products could breathe on their own without getting strangled by in vogue confectionaries.

Oven where Bakharkhanis are baked

Sabir Ahamed
Convenor, Know Your Neighbour

Kidderpore Food Map





Organised by
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A HERITAGE FOOD FEST

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KHANA-E-KIDDERPORE

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