

# What Was Mughal Cuisine?

## Defining and Analysing a Culinary Culture

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**Abstract:** This article aims at interrogating the problem of defining and analysing a culinary culture, with special reference to what may loosely be termed as ‘Mughal cuisine’. The essay begins with a discussion of the issues inherent to defining the boundaries of ‘Mughal cuisine’ in terms of what constitutes ‘Mughal’ and what may be classified as a ‘cuisine’. This is followed by a discussion of various anthropological approaches to analysing cuisine, with particular emphasis on structuralism and its critiques. The article then goes on to draw on works by Elisabeth Rozin and Richard Dawkins to formulate a ‘flavour meme’ concept as an alternative analytical paradigm. However, it is emphasised that this is not necessarily intended as a universal model to be applied without regard to historical and cultural context. The conclusion advocates that cuisine, as a phenomenon, be analysed as a transcultural process rather than as a structure.

*Mughal<sup>1</sup> cuisine* is a term often used in Indian restaurants around the world to denote a rich, creamy array of dishes ostensibly tracing their origins to the imperial kitchens of the Mughal Empire. That most of this is part of popular myth creation and perpetuation need not detain us long. Many of the key ingredients used in these dishes today, particularly, tomatoes, potatoes and chillies, were practically unknown in most of the subcontinent prior to the eighteenth century (Narayanan 2015: 116-132). This is not to argue that the food eaten in Indian homes and restaurants today has nothing to do with the culinary creations served to Mughal emperors, but to emphasise, rather, that much has changed since then. Cuisine – as this article will show – is dynamic and ever evolving. My article will also argue that

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<sup>1</sup> Note on Transliteration: For Persian words, I have generally followed the system used in Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*. Two exceptions are made: the first in the case of conventionally accepted or standardised spellings of certain terms, names of persons and places. For instance, I have preferred Mughal instead of *mughul*. Secondly, the transliteration of words and names in titles of published books and articles in English have been retained as in the original.

culinary traditions and influences flow freely across socio-economic boundaries and are also almost always intermeshed in transcultural interactions. More specifically, this article will propose process-oriented alternatives to a structuralist analysis of cuisine.

This article consists of three parts. The first part will briefly interrogate the term ‘Mughal cuisine’ with reference to the history of the term ‘Mughal’ and anthropological definitions of ‘cuisine’. It will also provide a brief account of the sources that form the basis of the material analysed in this piece. The second part moves on to a discussion of various approaches adopted by anthropologists and historians in analysing culinary cultures. My aim here is to particularly point out the deficiencies of a strict structural approach, as well as to suggest an alternative analytical paradigm. This will then be illustrated with reference to empirical evidence primarily derived from Indo-Persian cookbooks produced approximately between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The conclusion will draw some historical and theoretical conclusions based on the preceding discussion with regard to both what ‘Mughal cuisine’ was or was not, as well as providing pointers as to how this and other culinary cultures may be understood and analysed.

## TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND SOURCES

### *Defining a Culinary Culture*

It is important to note at the outset, that the term ‘Mughal’ is not mentioned in Persian sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was not the preferred self-designation of the Timurid dynasty itself.<sup>2</sup> Never-

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<sup>2</sup> Mughal or *mughul* is the arabised Persian word for Mongol. It was purely in this sense that this word was used in Persian writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Neither the Mughal emperors themselves, nor their panegyrists or even their rivals referred to the dynasty as ‘Mughal’. The Mughals preferred to associate themselves with the lineage of Timur, although they indirectly also drew on the prestige of Gengiz K̄hān through the oft-used appellation *Gūrgān*, meaning, ‘son-in-law’, which was the title adopted by Timur as the husband to a princess in the line of the great K̄hān (Balabanlilar 2012: 9, 14). The title ‘Mughal’ or names similar to it, however, was widely used by contemporary Europeans when writing about the dynasty that dominated much of the Indian subcontinent in the seventeenth century. Thus, for instance the travelogue of French doctor François Bernier is entitled *Voyages de François Bernier contenant la description des Etats du Grand Mogol, de l’Indoustan, du royaume de Kachemire* (1699) and the account of the Italian Niccolao Ma-

theless, since it has gained general currency and acceptance in modern historiography, I shall use the term to loosely denote the dynasty, its elite as well as the empire and cultural artifacts associated with it. This is in line with the generally accepted use of the term.

However, when we are concerned with defining a culinary culture, the term does pose some problems. It is not at all certain what such a term might denote in social or political terms. Does it refer only to the Mughal emperors, or also to the *manṣabdārs* (rank-holders in the Mughal administration)? Perhaps it may be used to refer only to the *umarā'* or the very highly ranked *manṣabdārs*? In any case, none of these definitions indicates any kind of fixed socio-cultural identity, since the Mughal elite was very diverse. It included members belonging to various social and ethnic origins as well as religious persuasions, such as those who associated themselves with identities such as *Īrānī* (Persian), *Tūrānī* (Turkic), *Shaiḫzāda* (Indian Muslim), Hindu Rajput and Hindu Khatri, to name a few, as well as products of mixed marriages. What would a singularly defined 'cuisine' associated with such diversity possibly entail? In other words, the term must be understood as an umbrella term of convenience, and not as constituting a specific historical cultural entity.

Another, perhaps slightly more socioculturally appropriate term that I will use in this essay is 'Indo-Persian'. The Mughal elite, though diverse, shared a pluralistic Persianate cultural heritage. Where I am not referring to the elite of the Mughal Empire in political terms, but rather as a cultural entity, I shall prefer using the term 'Indo-Persian'. I am aware that this is a very slippery distinction, and that ultimately all labels are problematic. However, for the purposes of this article such a deployment of terminology may help ward off some amount of epistemological confusion. If one were to be pedantic, it would perhaps be more accurate and less anachronistic to

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nucci is entitled *Storia do Mogor* (completed circa 1700). It was probably only later, in around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that the term 'Mughal' came to be popular on the Indian subcontinent and was eventually adopted by the Mughal emperors and their chroniclers as well. I am unable to find a precise date or reference for the earliest usage(s) of the term 'Mughal' in Indo-Persian texts, so this is a tentative assessment based on my reading of early modern sources.

speak of the *cuisine represented by the corpus of Indo-Persian texts* dating to the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, rather than to speak of 'Mughal cuisine' or even 'Indo-Persian' cuisine. If I do not always stick to this lengthy appellation, it is only for the sake of brevity and convenience.

And then there is the question of what a *cuisine* is. When do a set of culinary creations qualify for this label?

The extant anthropological literature on the subject does not speak in one voice with respect to defining the concept of 'cuisine'. However, there is agreement on differentiating it from mere food preparation or cooking practices, since cuisine predicates a collective cultural understanding of taste. For Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, cuisine is 'the code that structures the practice of food and allows us to discuss and to represent taste' (Ferguson 2004: 18). Ferguson goes on to draw out certain conditions that a set of culinary practices must fulfil in order to qualify as a cuisine:

A more or less coherent repertory of culinary preparations, usually structured by the products at hand, becomes a true cuisine only when its status as a repertory becomes apparent. That is, culinary preparations become a cuisine when, and only when, the preparations are articulated and formalized, and enter the public domain. (Ferguson 2004: 19)

According to this conceptualisation, a cuisine comes into being when a set of individuated culinary practices becomes the subject of a collective discourse. This necessarily entails the formalisation of shared understandings of taste.

Other definitions of cuisine are more specific, and prescribe more stringent criteria for the label of 'cuisine' to apply. Thus, Michael Freeman enlists three factors as being essential to the development of cuisine: 'the availability of ingredients, many sophisticated consumers, and cooks and diners free from conventions of region and ritual' (Freeman 1977: 145). In addition, he characterises cuisine as being a product of attitudes that give primacy to the pleasure of consuming food, rather than to any ritualistic significance (Ibid.). This appears to be a very narrow definition that focuses exclusively on elite consumption. For Sidney Mintz, Freeman's definition

actually describes *haute* cuisine. Mintz's own understanding of cuisine sees it as tied to a region, with access to a particular set of ingredients that are determined by the geography, climate and history of the territory. Since *haute* cuisine is not bound by such constraints in the sourcing of ingredients, Mintz asserts that it must fall into a separate category (Mintz 1996: 99, 101).

In trying to collate the common and most applicable elements of these definitions of 'cuisine', two important features may be selected. Firstly, as Ferguson's definition points out, cuisine formalises shared understandings of taste within the public domain. Secondly, as against Mintz's absolute differentiation of cuisine from *haute* cuisine, a more fluid distinction should be adopted: one that sees *haute* cuisine as a subset of cuisine, and in constant interaction with its culinary environment.

The culinary artefacts discussed in this article consist mostly of recipes from Indo-Persian cookbooks dating to the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, occasionally corroborated by other contemporary sources. It would therefore be appropriate to take a closer look at the texts that form part of this corpus, and to assess their use as sources for the reconstruction of a culinary culture.

### *Indo-Persian Cuisine and Cookbooks*

Indo-Persian cookbooks were evidently copied many times, and there are surviving manuscripts with minor variations. This corpus of literature was alliterative in nature, often produced in different places under various titles. These would have presumably adorned the libraries of Mughal notables, as did many other texts on themes such as hunting, grammar, poetry, logic, geomancy, mathematics and perfumery. This corpus thus aligns closely with a culinary tradition that would, at the very least, have been familiar to high *manṣabdārs* and notables of the Mughal Empire, and with which they could identify.

There are some issues with regard to using Indo-Persian culinary manuals as sources. Often, only the names of the scribes and date of transliteration is known, and not the name of the author or the date of composition. We also have little information on how these texts were used. Were they actually regularly used as guides in the kitchen or were they merely articles

of prestige and representatives of normative style? From my reading of these texts, I would argue that Indo-Persian cookbooks were probably a bit of both. Most cookbooks offer a fairly detailed description of recipes, along with quantities of ingredients to be used, which suggests that they may not have been for ornamental use alone. However, explicit associations with the kitchens of kings and significant notables indicate that the books carried prestige value as well. One indication of both the utilitarian value as well as esteem conveyed by Indo-Persian cookbooks is indicated by the justification given by the translator of an English cookbook into Persian. The Persian text is entitled *Nusk̄ha-i Ni'mat K̄hān* on the subscript and is dated 1801.<sup>3</sup> This manuscript details some typical European dishes: recipes for tomato soup, vegetable soup, mock turtle soup and hare soup; entrées such as beef fillet, various kinds of stew, steak and mutton chop, mashed potatoes, and macaroni; as well as desserts such as apple dumplings, tartlets, and Shrewsbury cake.<sup>4</sup> This culinary manual appears to have been translated for an Indian audience, with the object of acquainting them with European foods. The text explains the motive behind the preparation of this translation thus: 'so that the book and the recipes contained in it may become commonplace in the assemblies and gatherings of the highest notables'.<sup>5</sup> This would suggest both a utilitarian purpose, as well as the motive of fulfilling curiosity or a taste for the 'exotic' among the notable or gentlemanly class.

Texts may be assigned approximate dates on the basis of internal evidence, such as style, names of persons mentioned, weights and measures, and ingredients recorded. With all these limitations, Indo-Persian texts still remain a valuable resource for the study of Mughal culinary history, and their contents may often be corroborated from a study of other sources such as medical treatises, histories and travelogues.<sup>6</sup> I will not provide a

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<sup>3</sup> "Nusk̄ha-i Ni'mat K̄hān", MS BL OR 2028. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to trace the English original.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, *passim*. See also the list of contents on ff. 1r-13r.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, f. 14v.

<sup>6</sup> The same or similar dishes recorded in Indo-Persian cookbooks are also mentioned in other contemporary sources, for example in the Abū-l Faḍl 'Allāmī, *Ā'in-i Akbarī*: 55-58; Ānand Rām 'Muḳḥliṣ', *Safarnāma-i Muḳḥliṣ*: *passim*; Nūr al-Dīn Muḥammad Jahāngīr. *Jahāngīrnāma: Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*: *passim*; "Ilājāt-i Dārāshukohī", MSS BNF Supplément Persan 342B, : *passim*; Jamshid Bilimoria, (trans.), *Ruka'at-i Alamgiri or Letters of Aurangzeb*, 12.

detailed catalogue of Indo-Persian cookbooks here. However, a short introduction to the corpus is in order, before I go into an analysis of recipes derived from these texts.

The earliest Indo-Persian cookbook that has come down to us is the *Ni'matnāma*, which was prepared under the aegis of the sultans of Mandu at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century. Norah Titley has translated its only available copy, which is in the possession of the British Library (Titley 2005).<sup>7</sup> The edition has been enhanced with a translator's introduction, colour plates, and a facsimile of the entire manuscript (MS). The *Ni'matnāma* MS consists of two parts, and as Titley notes, appears to have been started under the patronage of Ḡhiyāṣ Shāh and completed under Nāṣir Shāh (Titley 2005: xii).<sup>8</sup> The text is illustrated with miniature paintings in Persian style, also incorporating Indian elements. All the miniatures depict Sultan Ḡhiyāṣ Shāh at the centre of their narrative. This text differs in terms of the recipes it describes from the corpus of Indo-Persian cookbooks that came to be produced from the seventeenth century onwards. Although many of its recipes, such as *sambūsas* (savoury stuffed and fried pasties), *khichrī* (a dish of rice and lentils), *paliv* (*pulā'o*, or a dish with rice, meat and other ingredients), *sīkh* (skewered meat or fish), *yaḳhnī* (spiced meat broth) and *kabāb* (skewered or roast meat), it also contains many other recipes that derive from its west and central Indian geographical location, including *karhī* (a yoghurt or sour milk based dish combined with chickpea flour), *pīccha* (a dish prepared by adding ingredients to the surplus water that is left in the pot after cooking rice or other grains) and *khaṇḍawī* (swollen parched grain).

A number of cookbooks have come down to us from the period between the seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Here, I will introduce a few of these to give a flavour of their style and contents. One significant text from this period is the *Nusḳha-i Shāhjahānī* or the *Nān u Namak*.<sup>9</sup> It begins

<sup>7</sup> The facsimile MS has multiple foliation notations in English and Persian. My citations follow the same English foliation system used by Titley.

<sup>8</sup> The second part begins on facsimile MSS f. 162v. It is titled *Kitāb-i Ni'matnāma-i Nāṣirshāhī* with the following sub-inscription: *wa 'lṭrnāma wa tarkīb-i khwushbū'ī-hā wa tarkīb-i chūwa* (and 'lṭrnāma or text of perfumes and the methods of perfuming).

<sup>9</sup> There are many copies of this text available. The British Library copy (MS IO Islamic 2798) is entitled "Nān u Namak". The colophon of the Madras copy bears the title "Nusḳha-i

with a simple statement to the effect that it records the recipes of dishes prepared in Emperor Shahjahan's (r. 1627-1658) kitchen.<sup>10</sup> However, no author or date of composition is recorded. It contains ten chapters, on *nān-hā* (breads), *āsh-hā* (pottages), *qalīyas* and *dopiyāzas* (dressed meat dishes), *bhartas* (also *bhurta*; mashes), *zerbiryāns* (a kind of layered rice-based dish), *pulā'o*<sup>11</sup>, *kabābs*, *harīsas* (savoury porridge), *shishrangas* and *ḳḥāgīnas* (omelette), and *khichrī*. The last chapter covers *murabbā* (jams), *achār* (pickles), *pūrī* (fried bread), *shīrīnī* (sweets), *ḥalwā* (warm pudding) and finally some basic recipes for yoghurt, the preparation of *panīr* (Indian curd cheese) and for the colouring of butter and dough.<sup>12</sup> The description of recipes begins on the first page without any further preface.<sup>13</sup> The text ostensibly draws its importance from a declared association with the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan (r. 1627-1658), claiming to draw on the culinary repertoire of his kitchen. There is no mention of professional cooks or those involved in compiling the text.

Another significant cookbook – variously known as *Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt* or *Alwān-i Ni'mat* or *Ḳḥwān-i Alwān-i Ni'mat*<sup>14</sup> probably derives from the reign of Aurangzeb (r. 1656-1707) or somewhat later, since it re-

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Shāhjahānī", and a published edition under the same title has been edited by Saiyid Muḥammad Faḏlullāh Ṣāḥib. According to the editor, the Madras MS is catalogued D.No.526 and is dated 1263 AH. Another MS from Aligarh Muslim University (MS 98) is entitled "Alwān-i Ni'mat". The Salar Jung Museum and Library in Hyderabad also holds a copy of this text ("Dastūr-i Puḳḥtan-i Aṭī'ma", Ṭabāḳḥī 4, Acc. No. 1430). The citations here are taken from the published Madras text.

<sup>10</sup> *dastūr-i puḳḥtan-i aṭī'ma ke dar sarkār-i pādīshāh shāhjahān ma'ahu wazn be 'amal āmad (Nusḳḥa-i Shāhjahānī, p. 1).*

<sup>11</sup> Spellings and pronunciations of this word can vary. Steingass transliterates this at various points as *palāv*, *pilav*, *pilāv* or *pulāv* (Steingass 1892: 254, 999, 1063, 1169, 1529). Some MSS indicate the *hamza* or *pesh*. Others do not. One MS even uses *pūlāv* / *pūlā'o* (P-W-L-A-W) [MS SJML Ṭabāḳḥī 3, Acc. No. 1429, p. 1]. For the sake of uniformity, I have usually preferred John Platt's transliteration *pulā'o* for use in the context of Indian cookbooks (Platts 1884: 267).

<sup>12</sup> *Nusḳḥa-i Shāhjahānī*. See list of contents on p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> MS NMI "Alwān i-Ni'mat", S.No. 145, Acc. No. 96.479. This National Museum of India (NMI) manuscript is titled "Alwān-i Ni'mat" in the catalogue and the colophon. I will cite from the National Museum's MS in this article, but I will henceforth use the title "*Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt*", which occurs in the preface of the text. Other manuscripts (MSS) of this text include MS BL Add. 17959 (under the title "*Ḳḥwān-i Alwān-i Ni'mat*") and "*Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt*", MS APGOML Mutafarriqāt no. 210.

fers to ‘Ālamgīrī weights.<sup>15</sup> In any case, it can date to no later than 1765, which is the colophon date on the British Library MS.<sup>16</sup> The text itself bears the title *Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt*, which I will use here.<sup>17</sup> It is divided into 40 *bābs* (chapters) with each *bāb* devoted to a particular category of dishes.<sup>18</sup> The first chapter is on various varieties of breads (*nān* and *kulcha*) and subsequent chapters deal with *qalīyas* and *dopiyāzas*, *bhartas*, *kabābs*, *khichrī*, *zerbiryāns*, *achār* and various sweetmeats.<sup>19</sup>

There is some uncertainty regarding a cookbook called the *Ḳḥwān-i Ni‘mat*, which is attributed to Ni‘mat Ḳḥān ‘Ālī, a notable of Aurangzeb’s reign (1658-1707). Various archives around the world house cookbook manuscripts entitled *Ḳḥwān-i Ni‘mat*, all of which vary quite widely in terms of content.<sup>20</sup> Yet, they are attributed in the catalogues – sometimes speculatively – to Ni‘mat Ḳḥān ‘Ālī, in the absence of any other author identification. The evidence indicates that these are misattributions based on mistaken identity, due to a confusion regarding the title ‘Ḳḥwān-i Ni‘mat’. The

<sup>15</sup> “Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt”, MS NMI S.No. 145, Acc. No. 96.479, f.55v. As Habib notes, Aurangzeb did not introduce a new *man*. It remained valued at 40 *dāms* (copper coins) to a *ser*, as assigned by Shāhjahān. However, on account of the issuance of newer, lighter *dāms*, the rate of exchange between the *dām* and the *ser* changed to 43 *dāms*, and later to 44 *dāms* to a *ser*. These new weights were designated as “Ālamgīrī” weights, despite no intended change in their value (Habib 1999: 421-423). Unfortunately, the exact dates for these changes are not known, and therefore the text cannot be dated with any greater precision on the basis of this evidence.

<sup>16</sup> MS BL Add. 17959.

<sup>17</sup> See “Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt”, MS NMI S.No. 145, Acc. No. 96.479, f.2r.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, preface on ff. 1v-5v, list of contents on ff. 5v-6r.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, ff. 5v-6r and rest of MS. The full list of contents includes chapters on the following categories of dishes: breads (*nān-hā*), *qalīya* and *dopiyāza*, varieties of greens (*sāg*), *bharta*, pulses and lentils (*dāl*) *zerbiryān*, varieties of *khaṇḍawī* (savoury cakes made with pulse or gram flour) and other Indian sauce-based dishes (*sālan-hā-i hindī*), *khichrī*, *sholā* (dish usually with rice and meat, pulses and various vegetables), *kulthī* (a kind of sweet, sticky rice dish), *thūlī* (a thick sweet dish with flour and milk), *ṭāhirī* (another kind of rice and meat dish), *ḥalīm* (savoury porridge) and *kashk* (gruel with wheat and meat), *āsh*, *bara* (or *baṛa*: sort of fried cakes or dumplings), *juḡhrāt wa sikharn* (yoghurt based dishes), *shīrbirinj* (sweet dish made with rice and milk), *firnī* (sweet dish made with thickened milk and rice or rice flour) *fālūda* (a kind of flummery cut into small pieces and dunked in sherbet) and *panbhatta* (made with rice that is fried and soaked in water and then added to a sherbet), *saṃbosa*, *pūrī*, *gulgula* (sweet dumplings made with a thick batter) and *khajūr* (also a kind of sweet dumpling), *malīda* (sweet powdery mixture made of dough), *shīrīnī*, *murabbā*, *achār* as well as a chapter on shelling coriander and pepper, sweetening bitter butter or oil, and other basic recipes.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance, MS BL Add. 16871, ff.295-344; MS BL IO Islamic 2362.

only manuscript containing an in-text attribution that I am aware of is in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin.<sup>21</sup> This manuscript bears no date or colophon inscription to indicate provenance. The text is introduced with the following line: ‘compiled recipes of foods which Ni‘mat Kḥān ‘Ālī wrote titled *Kḥwān-i Ni‘mat*’.<sup>22</sup> This is an indirect attribution of purported original authorship. Such an attribution is inconsistent with the typical style of first-person identification by an eminent author. After this simple line of introduction, the text goes on to describe a number of recipes commonly found in Indo-Persian cookbooks of this period. These include many of the usual recipes for various varieties of breads, *qalīyas*, *dopiyāzas*, *bhartas*, *kabābs*, rice dishes such as *ṭāhirīs*, *pulā’os*, *zerbiryāns*, and *khichrīs*, as well as *kḥāgīnas*, *achārs*, and *ḥalwās*.<sup>23</sup>

There were also cookbooks that were specialised in their content. A copy of one such cookbook, titled *Alwān-i Ni‘mat* and transcribed in 1275 AH (c.1858/59) is dedicated to recipes of sweetmeats.<sup>24</sup> These include varieties of sweet breads such as *nān kḥaṭā’ī* (crisp bread, like a biscuit), sweet *pūrīs*, sweet *samosas* (or *sambosas*), *laḍḍū* and *ḥalwā*. The cookbook introduces each recipe with a line of praise:<sup>25</sup> for instance *sambosa-i yak tuhī dam dāda* (*samosa* with a pocket cooked on *dam*<sup>26</sup>)<sup>27</sup> is declared as being ‘among the famous and well-known sweets’<sup>28</sup>; *pūrī dam dāda bādāmī* (almond *pūrīs* cooked on *dam*) is said to be ‘among the delicious and excellent sweetmeats’<sup>29</sup> and *nān kḥaṭā’ī bādāmī* (almond *nān kḥaṭā’ī*)<sup>30</sup> is noted for being ‘among the rare and delicious recipes’<sup>31</sup>. In this manner, the cookbook not only expresses appreciation of taste with regard to the recipes it contains, but also advertises itself for carrying them.

<sup>21</sup> “*Kḥwān-i Ni‘mat*” of Ni‘mat Kḥān ‘Ālī, MS SBB Or. Oct. 98.

<sup>22</sup> ‘*nuskḥa-hā-i jamī aṭ’ima ke Ni‘mat Kḥān ‘Ālī tālīf namūda musammī be Kḥwān-i Ni‘mat kardā*’ (ibid, f.1v.)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, *passim*.

<sup>24</sup> “*Alwān-i Ni‘mat*”, MS APGOML Mutaffariqāt no. 208.

<sup>25</sup> “*Alwān-i Ni‘mat*”, MS APGOML Mutaffariqāt no. 208, *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> ‘*Dam dādan*’ usually refers to a style of slow cooking in a sealed container.

<sup>27</sup> Single pocket baked *samosas*.

<sup>28</sup> ‘*ke az jumla-i shīrīnī-hā-i mashhūra wa ‘ām bāshad*’

<sup>29</sup> ‘*az shīrīnī-hā-i kḥwushmaza u kḥūb u ‘umda ast*’

<sup>30</sup> Almond crisp bread.

<sup>31</sup> ‘*ke az nuskḥa-hā-i nau-i kamyāb u kḥwushmaza ast*’

The diversity of the Mughal domains and elite meant that the recipes in Indo-Persian cookbooks drew on multiple sources, including Iranian, Central Asian and local influences from various parts of the Indian subcontinent. These cookbooks thus include recipes for dishes as various in their origins as *khichrī* and *qalīya* (dressed meat with a sauce made with fried onions as its base). Nevertheless, there was a considerable degree of standardisation of recipes visible across the corpus of Indo-Persian cookbooks, in terms of the categories of recipes described, the ingredients used and the cooking methods prescribed. Thus, while it may be somewhat anachronistic and sociologically problematic to speak of a singular ‘Mughal cuisine’, something approaching this concept did probably exist, at least within the corpus of Indo-Persian cookbooks. This was a well-developed and consciously articulated *haute cuisine*, which drew on ingredients and techniques from various parts of the world, and yet was also driven by local influence and context.

## ANALYSING CUISINE

### *Theoretical Approaches*

How do we understand and analyse cuisine and its role as a cultural marker? This has been the subject of much anthropological debate over the decades. The first significant contribution to evolving theoretical bases for the analysis of cuisine came from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). Lévi-Strauss analysed cuisine as being composed of distinct units arranged in accordance with specific ‘grammatical’ structures. His analysis of cuisine used linguistics as a model and a metaphor. In his comparative analysis of English and French cuisine contained in the major tome, *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss analysed cuisine as being composed of distinct building unites of taste called ‘gusteme’, which were a direct linguistic counterpart of the term ‘phoneme’ (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 86). Similarly, in an influential article entitled ‘the culinary triangle’, Lévi-Strauss replaced units of taste with measures of rawness/cooking, but the inherent conceptual understanding of cuisine as an amalgam of discrete and measurable components remained the same (Lévi-Strauss 2008: 36-43).

While differing in their methods and approaches, basic elements of Lévi-Strauss's structural approach were adopted by Roland Barthes and Mary Douglas. These scholars – as well as others who followed the structural analysis approach – studied cuisine through the lens of metaphors and terms of analyses such as 'structure', 'code', 'grammar' and 'system'. The symbolisms of food, of meals and of recipes were seen as encoded in fixed and structured ways, minimising the fluidity and complexities of food cultures and cuisine. This is apparent, for instance, when Barthes argues:

No doubt, food is, anthropologically speaking (though very much in the abstract), the first need; but ever since man has ceased living off wild berries, this need has been highly structured. Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food. For the fact that there is communication is proven, not by the more or less vague consciousness that its users may have of it, but by the ease with which all the facts concerning food form a structure analogous to other systems of communication. [...] (i)n other words, it would be a matter of separating the significant from the insignificant and then of reconstructing the differential system of signification by constructing, if I may be permitted to use such a metaphor, *a veritable grammar of foods*. (Barthes 2008: 21, 22)

If Barthes saw the 'psychosociology' of food as reducible to a grammatical structure of symbolisms, Douglas saw food signifiers as elemental aspects of a structured understanding of food culture (Douglas 1972: 61-81). She too uses the metaphor of language and grammar to frame her analysis of social meanings embedded in food practices, arguing that food categories 'encode social events' (Ibid. 1972: 61).

Within the context of South Asian studies, Francis Zimmerman's monograph *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats* also analysed idealised versions of Indian meals in structuralist terms. In a chapter entitled "Logic and Cuisine", Zimmerman argues that in every Indian meal, rice or bread is at the centre and vegetables and meat in the form of curries and fricassees occupy peripheral positions. This 'logic', Zimmermann goes on to assert, also

guides the cataloguing of cereals and seasonings (*vyañjana*) – composed of meats, fruits and vegetables – in Ayurvedic texts (Zimmermann 1987: 125-126). In Zimmermann’s analysis, culinary practice was guided by the ‘gourmet logician’s gaze’, which was mirrored in scholarly treatises on medicine. As he states: ‘cuisine proceeds in the same manner as logic, through combinations (mixtures, sauces) and transformations (the various modes of cooking)’ (Zimmermann 1987: 128). Moreover, in Zimmermann’s account, ‘Indian cuisine’ appears to have an almost timeless element to it, wherein contemporary culinary culture accords with the logic of ancient texts. It is true that staples occupy an important position in most Indian diets – something not unusual in settled agricultural societies. However, this does not translate into any logical grammar of meals as posited by Zimmermann. Firstly, there can be no singular account of ‘Indian cuisine’. Secondly, as my analysis in this chapter will show, even in the fairly limited culinary context of Indo-Persian cookbooks, it is impossible to tease out any fixed logic of meal components.

Ravindra S. Khare’s studies on what he calls ‘Hindu gastronomy’ were also influenced by structuralism. These were based on his ethnographic investigations among Kānyakubja Brahmins and some other caste groups in the Lucknow-Rae Bareli region in various phases of fieldwork between 1958 and 1972 (Khare 1976b: 12-17). The empirical results and analysis of these findings were presented in two monographs: *Hindu Hearth and Home* and *Culture and Reality*, both published in 1976 (Khare 1976a; 1976b). Khare’s basic argument was that despite variations within and across caste groups, ‘Hindu gastronomy’ followed a distinct grammar and logic based on rules of purity and commensality. His analysis of this is presented in the language of symbolic logic, broadly following the structuralist paradigm (Khare 1976a; 1976b). However, it must be noted that Khare’s analysis is much more sophisticated and nuanced than many other works influenced by structuralism. He carefully documents variability in practice and notes significant processes of change that were, he argues, not merely cosmetic (Khare 1976b: 243-263, 268-269). Nevertheless, Khare’s construction of a category such as ‘Hindu gastronomy’ based on his investigations among a few select caste groups in one small Northern Indian region is highly problematic. Also, his analysis of the changes in food behaviours observed among his in-

formants is not integrated into his theoretical formulations. It is as if they stand outside it, like acknowledged imposters.

From the 1980s onwards, there emerged a number of critiques of the structuralist approach. Jack Goody in his *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* pointed out that Lévi-Strauss' analytical categories were arbitrary and did not emerge out of the cultures he was studying (Goody 1982: 17-29). They also conflated socio-economic categories within these cultures. Mennell and Ferguson, both sociologists by training, have adopted a historical approach to analysing cuisine as being more appreciative of the fluid and processual nature of culinary cultures. Mennell's work, for instance, analyses the differential historical trajectories of culinary cultures in England and France from the medieval period to the present (Mennell 1985), while Ferguson traces the origins and evolution of modern French gastronomy in the context of post-revolutionary France (Ferguson 2004).

Structuralism made fundamental contributions to the study of food and the analysis of cuisines, particularly in drawing attention to the role of food as a marker of social distinction and as a cultural symbol. However, structuralism in its classical form suffered from a few fundamental flaws: it failed to account for processes of change in food behaviours over time, it usually glossed over complexities and diversities in food practices within cultures, and it effectively reduced food to the status of a symbolic social mediator, rather than analysing both its material functions as well as its role as a signifier.

My analysis of the recipes recorded in Indo-Persian cookbooks similarly militates against a simplistic structuralist analysis of cuisine. A purely structuralist deconstruction neither aids a better understanding of how culinary cultures evolve, nor the manner in which one 'cuisine' may be compared with or differentiated from another. I shall illustrate this with a brief analysis of selected recipes from Indo-Persian cookbooks, as well as a comparative analysis with Persian cookbooks originating in Şafawid and Qājār Iran. I will also propose an alternative analytical method.

### *Analysing Cuisine: The Lives of Recipes*

Recipes frequently encountered in Indo-Persian cookbooks are classified as per certain typical categories, which include breads (*nān-hā*), rice dishes such as *khichrī*, *pulā'os* and *zerbiryāns*, kebabs (*kabāb*), dressed meat dishes (*qalīyas* and *dopiyāzas*), savoury porridge (*ḥalīm wa harīsa*) as well as sweets and puddings (*shirīnī-hā wa ḥalwājāt*). For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to focus on four specific indications of fluidity, which illustrate the unsuitability of strict structuralism: (1) the incidence of dishes of 'commonplace' origin, (2) a comparative analysis of Mughal and Ṣafawid culinary preparations, (3) the issue of the categorisation of meals, courses and dishes, and (4) the problem of 'authenticity'. Methodologically, it is sufficient to show evidence of several ways in which the evidence does not match with the predictions of structural analysis, in order to render it invalid and unsuitable as an analytical framework. This will accordingly be the focus of this section.

The intention in this section is not to construct a detailed or comprehensive catalogue of recipes. That would only amount to several pages of dry description. The aim here is, rather, to outline a sample that would serve as an empirical basis for further theoretical analysis. An alternative analytical paradigm that I propose here is based on the concept of 'flavour principles' posited by Elisabeth Rozin (Rozin 2000: 134-142). Rozin argues that every cuisine engenders certain spice and technique combinations that produce tastes based on distinct understandings of flavour. Through various combinations and recombinations of these – according to familiar patterns – new recipes may be evolved. It is these flavour patterns that enable the evolution of cuisine, by allowing for the creation of new combinations within a familiar spectrum of tastes (Ibid. 2000: 135). I would interpret the evidence from my sources as suggesting that these 'flavour principles' are dynamic and evolve through the very process by which they allow for the formulation of recipes. Rozin's concept of 'flavour principles' may be tied up with the concept of memes proposed by the evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins. According to Dawkins, *memes* may be regarded as the cultural analogy of genes. Like genes, they are 'selfish replicators' that spread in the primordial soup of human memory and imagination through means of communication such as speech and writing. Memes, like genes, are in a

constant state of evolution, gradually metamorphosing as they spread. Examples of memes could be musical tunes, religious or political ideas, clothing fashions, architectural designs and surgical techniques (Dawkins 2006: 3708-3923).

The concept of memes has since been adapted by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and linguists (among others) to explain a wide variety of social institutions and cultural phenomena, such as ideals of happiness (Gilbert 2006: 212-220), the spread of ideas in translation theory (Chesterman 2016), the persistence of capitalism (Kaufman 2012) and the spread of motifs, ideas and images in digital culture (Shifman 2014). Some have pointed out the imperfections inherent in the analogic character of the meme concept (Ibid. 2014: 11-12), but its usefulness as an analytical tool has nevertheless been acknowledged by its widespread and diverse application. Another criticism concerns the undermining of human agency, but as has been persuasively argued by scholars such as Limor Shifman, this is not necessarily inherent to the meme concept (Ibid. 2014: 12). Indeed, as the works cited in the footnotes of this section show, the meme concept – through its evolution – has been adapted in diverse and more nuanced ways.

Recipes arguably also spread in mimetic ways following the evolution of certain flavour principles. Once a cooking technique, spice mixture, combination of ingredients or serving style (akin to Rozin's 'flavour principles') is successful because of biological (primordial taste) or socio-cultural (acquired taste) factors, it gets passed through verbal or written channels of communication. Here, the agency of human transmitters is vital. Thus, a loose adaptation of Dawkin's concept of memes may be used to explain the manner in which Rozin's 'flavour principles' evolve dynamically. We may also refer to these as 'flavour memes'. Every time a flavour meme is passed on, it 'ensures' (the use of anthropomorphic language here is purely metaphorical) its own survival and replication, but it also evolves somewhat. This may be because every cook is different, or because new ingredients, cooking styles and techniques become available. The interpretation of the meme concept adopted here thus gives importance to human agency, while acknowledging that the overall effect of recipes being transmitted or codified involves more than a mathematical summation of the conscious actions of individual agents. Thus, when recipes are passed on and modified, this

process of evolution appears to acquire a life of its own that often goes beyond the individual intentions of the creators and communicators of recipes.

As against Zimmerman's positing of a timeless logical grammar underlying every Indian meal, my argument thus stresses the vibrant nature of culinary practice. But before developing and applying the Rozin-Dawkins analytical paradigm further, it is necessary to examine the predictions made by structuralism and the extent to which these are supported by evidence drawn from the corpus of Indo-Persian cookbooks.

A structuralist approach would predict that food dishes and recipes would serve as markers of social distinction and that elite food habits and preferences would therefore be clearly distinguishable from those of the 'common masses'. An examination of early modern culinary manuals as well as other contemporary sources clearly speaks against this assumption.

For instance, we find many 'commonplace' recipes in Indo-Persian cookbooks that were clearly composed within an elite context and for an elite audience. This includes, for instance, *khichrī*. This dish was a common staple all over North India. It is mentioned in the verses attributed to the weaver-poet Kabīr (fl. circa 1500), although the dating and provenance of the compositions is not always precisely determinable (Das 1991: 12, verse no. 240; Callewaert 2005: 137-152). At the same time, this dish is also mentioned in the travelogue of an eighteenth century notable in Shahjahanabad, Ānand Rām Muḥliṣ<sup>32</sup>, as well in the memoirs of Emperor Jahāngīr<sup>33</sup>.

Recipes for *khichrī* are also ubiquitous in Indo-Persian cookbooks, and here the recipes range from simple combinations of rice and lentils to complex preparations including vegetables, meats and spices. The oldest Indo-Persian cookbook that we have (the *Ni'matnāma*, Malwa, end 15th and early 16th century) contains several recipes for *khichrī* (Titley 2005: *passim*). Most of the *khichrī* recipes in Persian cookbooks include the use of meat. However, all Persian cookbooks also include some variations that are vegetarian. The *khichrī-i Gujarātī* or Gujarati *khichrī* is one such commonly described recipe. The *Ḳhulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt* starts the recipe with fried garlic, into which onion rings, cinnamon, and other spices are added

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<sup>32</sup> Ānand Rām Muḥliṣ, *Safarnāma-i Muḥliṣ*, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Jahāngīr, *Jahāngīrnāma: Tūzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, 239.

and again fried. Then cumin is added, following which the whole mixture is removed from the heat. The *dāl mūng* (mungbean pulses) is then fried in that ghee, and the ghee is drained. Rice is added to the *dāl* (pulses or lentils) and mixed well. The spice mixture mentioned earlier is added to this, along with hot water and ginger. Ghee is added and the dish is sealed and slow-cooked to finish.<sup>34</sup> The *Nusk̄ḥa-i Shāhjahānī* and many other cookbooks also carry the same recipe.<sup>35</sup> The recipe is of medium level complexity, in terms of cooking techniques employed and number of ingredients prescribed. The use of many spices, however, marks it out as a dish for an elite kitchen. A relatively simpler recipe for a *khichrī* made with *arhar dāl* (split pigeon pea), is also described in the *Ḳḥulāṣat*. In this recipe, the *dāl* is cooked in water till soft and the water has been absorbed. Half the ghee is then added to the *dāl*, and the rice is fried in the rest. Then, the *dāl* and spices are added to the rice, along with water. It is then put on *dam* (or pressure, i.e., slow cooked in a sealed container) in the final stage before being ready to serve.<sup>36</sup> Other recipes are more complicated and call for the use of meat. The ingredients listed for *khichrī Dāwud Ḳḥānī* are oil or ghee (*raughan*), *mūng*, meat, pureed spinach, a hen's egg, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, onions, ginger, salt, coriander, garlic and saffron.<sup>37</sup> The preparation process described is extremely complicated. According to the recipe, part of the meat is used to prepare a *yakḥnī* (meat broth) with spices. The rest is minced, and following a lengthy process, is prepared as a *dopiyāza*. Later, this is combined with the other ingredients over several steps and cooked in a sealed pot (*dam dahad*). The dish is garnished in the end with boiled and halved eggs.<sup>38</sup>

Such nuance and range of cooking methods as well as exchange of recipes and techniques is inconsistent with structural analysis. Structuralism involves a clear definition of social categories and concomitant cultural traits. As we have seen from the *khichrī* example, problematic distinctions such as 'elite' and 'popular' do not lend themselves as suitable to the analy-

<sup>34</sup> "Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt", MS NMI S.No.145, Acc. No. 96.479, f. 47v.

<sup>35</sup> *Nusk̄ḥa-i Shāhjahānī*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> "Ḳḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt", MS NMI S.No.145, Acc. No. 96.479, f. 47r.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, f. 45v.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, ff. 45v-46r.

sis of culinary cultures. The other issue is the definition of cultural boundaries. Such distinctions form the core, for example, of Lévi-Strauss's comparison between English and French food, which created artificial national boundaries between culinary cultures.

On the other hand, the 'flavour meme' analytical paradigm allows for the flow of spice combinations and cooking techniques across social and cultural groups. The combination of rice (or other grains) and lentils or pulses could be seen both as a flavour principle as well as powerful meme that spread across so-called social boundaries. This basic meme combined with other spice combinations or flavour principles that were derived from various cultures. For instance, the combination of spinach and eggs in the *khichrī Dāwud Khānī* probably derived from the Iranian *nargīsī* prototype, which involved just such a pairing.

The phenomenon of flavour principles flowing across cultures and social groups becomes more starkly apparent when Indo-Persian culinary traditions are examined. The variety of culinary traditions drawn upon in Indo-Persian cookbooks is often brought out by the names of the recipes themselves, which often derived from ostensible cooking styles. Examples include *qalīya Shīrāzī* (Shiraz style *qalīya* or sauce based dish), *zerbiryān-i Rūmī* (Ottoman style *zerbiryān*), *Shīrāzī pulā'o* (*pulā'o*, Shiraz style), *ḥalwā-i Rūmī* (Ottoman style *ḥalwā*)<sup>39</sup>, and *ḥalwā-i Firangī* (European style *ḥalwā*) and *bharta-i Gujarātī*.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the various regions and cultures that the Mughals ruled over, or with whom they had trading and cultural contacts evidently influenced the collection of recipes reproduced in Indo-Persian cookbooks. In this milieu, it would be difficult to separate, say, Mughal cuisine associated with the great Rajput families of northwestern India, or 'Gujarati' cuisine. In fact, these categories themselves appear to subsume many 'sub-cultures' and influences.

The issue of boundary construction in a structuralist comparison of cuisines may also be illustrated through an actual exercise in comparison. Here, selected recipes in Indo-Persian and Iranian cookbooks are compared with respect to ingredients and cooking methods in order to highlight pat-

<sup>39</sup> *Ḥalwā* is spelt in some places in the printed text of the *Nuskhā-i Shāhjahānī* as *ḥalwa*, but I have retained the standard spelling here.

<sup>40</sup> "Kḥulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt", f. 29r

terns of commonality and differential culinary evolution. The two seventeenth century Şafawid Iranian texts chosen for this purpose are *Kārnāma dar bāb-i Ṭabākhī wa şan'at-i ān* (or *Manual on Dishes and their Preparation*) of Ḥājī Muḥammad 'Alī Bāwarchī Baghdādī and *Mādat al-Ḥaiwat* (or *The Substance of Life*).<sup>41</sup>

Some of the recipes frequently detailed in Indo-Persian cookbooks find their counterparts in these Iranian texts. The basic concepts of recipes such as *qalīya*, *dopiyāza*, *pulā'o* (or *pilāv*), *kabāb*, *ḥalīm* and *harīsa* are shared. Also shared are certain essential pieces of kitchen equipment such as *tanūr* (tandoor or oven), *deg* (cauldron or cooking pot) and *sīkh* (skewer). But beyond that, there are many differences in detail. In particular, the recipes in Indo-Persian cooking manuals employ a wide variety of Indian ingredients, including spices, fish and vegetables peculiar to the subcontinent. These differences may be made clearer through a comparison of Iranian and Indian recipes for a few dishes. For instance, the *Mādat al-Ḥaiwat* details the method for preparing a basic *qalīya* as follows: the meat is chopped into tiny pieces and cleaned; onion rings and plenty of finely chopped herbs are added to this meat. When the meat is half cooked, several sticks of cinnamon, some whole pepper, ginger, ground pepper, cloves and green cardamom and finally, salt is added.<sup>42</sup> In the version of the *qalīya* detailed in most Indo-Persian cookbooks, onions are first fried; the meat is chopped into large pieces (*pārcha-i kalān*) and then fried and tempered in spices with this mixture.<sup>43</sup> The *Kārnāma* uses a similar basic *qalīya* recipe as the *Mādat al-Ḥaiwat* for the several *qalīya* variations that it details.<sup>44</sup> *Qalīya Nargisī* is an example of a dish that appears both in Indo-Persian and Iranian cookbooks. In the Indian version, the meat is cut into large pieces, and fried with onions and ghee. Salt, ginger and whole coriander are added. To this mixture, beets, carrots and *dāl* (pulses) are added and cooked till soft. The beets and carrots are then separated from the meat, and the *shorbā* (soup) is passed along with the *dāl* through a cloth, then combined with the meat and tempered with cloves and ghee. Cooked rice is passed through a

<sup>41</sup> *Kārnāma wa Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 235.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, see *Nuskha i Shāhjahānī*, 11-32, for descriptions of *qalīya* and *dopiyāza* recipes.

<sup>44</sup> *Kārnāma wa Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, 123-155.

piece of cloth and the rice water is held. Spices, saffron, dry fruits and crushed spices are then added. This mixture is then removed from the pot, a *dopiyāza* is made out of the *sāg* (greens) and it is then cooked on a *māhī tāba* (or *tawa*<sup>45</sup> – iron skillet). An egg is added and the dish is cooked further. Finally, crushed spices are added on top.<sup>46</sup> In the Iranian version recorded in the *Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, the basic *qālīya* recipe described earlier is used. According to this recipe, after cooking the *qālīya*, spinach should be added, and several eggs should be cracked open over the spinach. Ground spices are then to be added, and *kirmānī* cumin along with salt is sprinkled on top of the eggs.<sup>47</sup> The *Kārnāma* also uses a similar recipe, namely it prescribes the preparation of a basic meat *qālīya*, with the addition of spinach and eggs.<sup>48</sup> The use of spinach (or other leafy greens) and eggs are the primary characteristics common to both the Iranian and Indian versions of this recipe. However, the Indian version also includes *dāl* and root vegetables (namely carrots, beets and turnips) and is also prepared and spiced differently. If we compare *pulā'o* recipes as well, a similar picture emerges. Most of the *pulā'o* recipes in Indo-Persian cookbooks are quite distinct from their Iranian counterparts, despite sharing fundamental elements. In particular, Indian *pulā'os* were spiced very differently, and used different herbs and spices as compared to their Iranian counterparts. However, there are also a few specific recipes that are found both in Ṣafawid era cookbooks as well as in their Indo-Persian counterparts. For instance, the *nargisī pilāv*<sup>49</sup> recipe, which is found in the *Kārnāma*, also has a variation in many Indo-Persian cookbooks, including the *Nuskḥa-i Shāhjahānī*. Both recipes share the basic element of incorporating spinach and eggs as key ingredients.<sup>50</sup> Another such recipe is the *muza'far pulā'o* (or *pilāv*). The recipes in the *Kārnāma* and

<sup>45</sup> Spelt in many cookbook MSS as *māhī tāba*, but spelt in the printed text of the *Nuskḥa-i Shāhjahānī* as *māhī tawa*. See *Nuskḥa-i Shāhjahānī*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Kārnāma wa Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, 235.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 152-153.

<sup>49</sup> Spellings and pronunciations of this word can vary. Steingass transliterates this at various points as *palāv*, *pilav* (this transliteration possibly an error), *pilāv* or *pulāv* (Steingass 1892: 254, 999, 1063, 1169, 1529). Some MSS indicate the *hamza* or *pesh*. Others do not. One MS even uses *pūlāv* / *pūlā'o* (P-W-L-A-W) [MS SJML Ṭabākhī 3, Acc. No. 1429, p. 1]. For the Iranian version of the dish, however, I prefer *pilāv*.

<sup>50</sup> *Kārnāma wa Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, 114-115; *Nuskḥa-i Shāhjahānī*, 40.

the *Nuskhā-i Shāhjahānī* are similar in using a stuffed chicken as a key element in the recipe, but other aspects of preparation and spicing differ between the Indian version and the Iranian one.<sup>51</sup> Thus, even when recipe names and basic concepts are shared, the actual preparation and spicing process differ in various respects.

The foregoing analysis illustrates the impossibility of constructing a structuralist comparison of early modern 'Mughal' and 'Şafawid or 'Iranian' and 'Indian' cuisine. First, there is a question of what 'Mughal' or 'Şafawid' denoted, since these so-called 'elite' cuisines cannot be separated from their broader culinary contexts. At the same time, while there were several differences between the ingredients and cooking methods prescribed in Indo-Persian and early modern Iranian cookbooks, there was also much continuity and many shared influences. This recalls the manner in which, for instance, Lévi-Strauss ignored the fact that the English nobility had long favoured French *haute* cuisine (Mennell 1985: 8). The work of Cecilia Leong-Salobir on the colonial cuisines of India and Malaya illustrates the manner in which the colonial context produced a hybrid cuisine born out of recipes brought by 'native' cooks into Anglo-Indian and Malayan kitchens (Leong-Salobir 2011). The fact that, for instance, the Indian *qalīya nargīsī* shared its basic character with its Şafawid counterpart, while still retaining a unique character poses problems for a structuralist analysis.

This phenomenon of porous culinary traditions and practices, would, however, pose no problems for a 'flavour meme' analytical paradigm. Contact with various influences lead to the evolution of new flavour principles in a gradual fashion. Thus, the Iranian culinary influences did not replace Indian culinary practices or even supplement them. Rather, they blended with the culinary traditions of the Indian subcontinent. This is evident when we consider the *khichrī*, *pulā'o* and *qalīya*. In the case of the *khichrī*, a recipe concept deriving from the Indian subcontinent was often embellished with various other flavour combinations, while in the case of the *pulā'o* and *qalīya*, recipe concepts probably of Iranian or Central Asian origin or inspiration, but which integrated many Indian elements. The cultures of origin I identify here (Indian, Iranian, Central Asian) are only immediate ones. In

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<sup>51</sup> *Kārnāma u Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, 128-129; *Nuskhā-i Shāhjahānī*, 42-43.

reality, as cuisine is in a constant state of evolution, blending various influences, no fixed cultures of origin may be assigned.

There is a third aspect of the cuisine described in Indo-Persian cookbooks that does not fit into the typical structuralist framework. Structuralism as envisioned by anthropologists such as Lévi-Strauss, Barthes and Douglas usually involved clearly defined meals, courses and categories of dishes. This may have been influenced by their understanding of a limited range of European or western traditions in the twentieth century, but certainly does not represent universal phenomena. The evidence of Indo-Persian cookbooks is indicative of a more fluid concept of meals and courses. For one, dry and wet, heavy and light as well as sweet and savoury dishes are often intermingled in Indo-Persian cookbooks. Contemporary Indian and Persian sources are also not consistent in describing fixed meal times or courses. However, I would refrain from reading too much into this aspect, since it may also be interpreted as an artefact of the kind of source material that has come down to us: the evidence is scattered, and histories, chronicles, memoirs and travelogues often describe atypical situations.

Structuralist analysis has never sought to explain the evolution of recipes and culinary cultures. At best, structuralist anthropology has focussed on accounting for the manner in which the basic structure of food practices survives despite 'cosmetic' or 'superficial' changes. A significant issue with this approach is the *a priori* assumption that there does indeed exist a 'pure' structure, or an 'authentic' culture. The problematic nature of this assumption may be illustrated with the example of the *biryānī*. In the context of the present, this is a spiced rice dish with many variations. A probable 'ancestor' can be traced to cookbooks produced in early modern Iran. For instance, The *Kārnāma dar bāb-i Ṭabākhī wa ṣan'at-i ān* has a set of recipes called *biryān* that combine meat or fowl with rice, often layered over each other.<sup>52</sup> The *Mādat al-Ḥaiwat* has a few recipes under a single heading *biryān pilāv* that also describe similar preparations.<sup>53</sup> Indo-Persian cookbooks contain similar recipes under the broad category of *zerbiryān*. These recipes involved an elaborate *dumpukht* process, which implied slow

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<sup>52</sup> *Kārnāma wa Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, 159-161.

<sup>53</sup> *Kārnāma wa Mādat al-Ḥaiwat*, 214-215.

cooking in a pot sealed with batter. The Indian *zerbiryāns* were cooked in a *degcha* (cooking pot), rather than in a *tanūr*.<sup>54</sup> From its earliest described recipes to the astounding variety of *biryānīs* popular today, it is impossible to designate a single ‘original’ or ‘authentic’ preparation. Culinary change should thus be viewed in evolutionary terms rather than as a basic structure only superficially inflected by ‘external’ influences.

Moreover, even a structured categorisation of dishes is problematic. There are many rice dishes described in Indo-Persian cookbooks including *khichrī*, *pulā’o*, *zerbiryān*, *ṭāhirī* and *qabūlī*. However, in terms of ingredients and cooking techniques, it is difficult to draw a particular distinction or a set of criteria that can consistently be applied to differentiate between them. *Pulā’o*, *zerbiryān* and *ṭāhirī* had in common the use of rice, meat and spices. The *zerbiryān* involved a unique *dumpuḳht* process, but similar, slightly less elaborate *dum* (pressure cooking) methods were used for various other preparations. *Pulā’os* were typically more elaborate than other rice dishes, but this could also vary. Similarly, both *dopiyāza* and *qalīya* preparations represented ways of dressing meat with a base of fried onions, the only difference being that *qalīyas* were usually a little ‘wetter’.

## CONCLUSION: ANALYSING CUISINE AS A PROCESS

Scepticism of the structuralist approach led many food anthropologists to abandon a theoretical approach altogether. Generalising analysis was seen as typical of the structuralist approach, with all its documented shortcomings. For this reason, a mainly historical and comparative approach that eschewed grand explanatory models was favoured even by scholars trained in anthropology and sociology such as Mennell and Ferguson.

However, I would argue that the shortcomings of structuralism are no reason to abandon an analytical approach altogether. This, however, has to be flexible enough to accommodate diverse cultural and historical situations. But more importantly, it must have the capacity to explain change, i.e. it should be process-oriented.

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<sup>54</sup> See for instance, *Nusḳha-i Shāhjahānī*, 35-37.

Certain flavour principles may be suggested on the basis of my analysis of Indo-Persian culinary manuals. It is notable that certain spice combinations occur repeatedly in these cookbooks. The spices most commonly used are *dārchīnī* (cinnamon), *zīra* (cumin), *qaranful* (cloves), *ilāychī* (cardamom), *filfil* (black pepper), *adarak* (ginger), *kishnīz* (coriander), and *zard chūb* (turmeric). These are almost always combined with onions. In fact, fried onions form the basis of most savoury dishes. While all the spices mentioned above are not used in every dish, the majority of them appear repeatedly in combination. These spice combinations, found frequently across the spectrum of Indo-Persian cookbooks, give the dishes described a more intensive flavour than their mildly spiced Iranian counterparts. Moreover, there is evidence that strong elements of the sweet taste were often incorporated into savoury recipes. This was done through making a *chāsh-nīdār* or 'syrupy' variation of the dish, which involved adding a mixture of sugar syrup and lemon to the dish. Thus, there were *chāshnīdār* variations of various *qalīya* and *dopiyāza* recipes. I have argued that an adaptation of Rozin's 'flavour principles' formulation combined with a modification of Dawkins' meme concept may be fruitfully employed as an analytical metaphor to capture some of the dynamicity of culinary evolution. However, this may not be the only useful or applicable analytical paradigm that should necessarily be applied to all contexts. I advocate a flexible approach, and above all, one that does not carry metaphors to their absurd conclusions.

On the basis of the anthropological definitions of cuisine discussed in this paper, as well as drawing on recent anthropological and sociological writings on the analysis of cuisine, a few conclusions may be drawn on the definition and analysis of 'Mughal cuisine'. There are problems with the term 'Mughal cuisine' itself, as has been discussed above. Nevertheless, I do use the word 'Mughal' because of its widespread acceptance in the academic literature and because it does, to some degree, evoke the cultural pluralism of the Mughal elite. Secondly, to the extent that a culinary culture can be reconstructed from Indo-Persian sources – and to a significant but not entirely precise degree it can – this culture may be characterised as constituting both a '*cuisine*' and an '*haute cuisine*'. The '*cuisine*' of Indo-Persian cookbooks was characterised by a recognisable set of recipes, ingredients and cooking techniques that were fluid and forever evolving in

response to local and ‘foreign’ influences. Despite being an ‘*haute cuisine*’ that included the use of some expensive ingredients imported over long distances, it also incorporated much that drew or purported to draw on the bazaar and the food of the ‘common folk’. For instance, the *Khulāṣat* has a recipe for *qīma kabāb ʿarāḥ-i bāzār* (bazaar style mincemeat kebabs).<sup>55</sup> The same recipe is also found in the *Nusḵha-i Shāhjahānī*.<sup>56</sup> Whether or not this recipe was ‘authentic’ is not the point: rather, it illustrates how the food world of these cookbooks was not separated from that of the bazaar, and that recipes, recipe titles and culinary influences flowed both ways. The *Nīmatnāma* also records recipes with similar titles suggestive of popular or rustic origins: *māhī rūstāī ganwārī* (rustic rural fish) and *rūstāī sabzī* (rural style vegetables).<sup>57</sup>

In this article, I have suggested some approaches for the analysis of the cuisine represented in Indo-Persian texts, which comes closest to what is often characterised as ‘Mughal cuisine’. Some aspects of these propositions may have wider or even universal applicability. However, there may also be other explanatory formulations that may be adopted in various situations: these must be sensitive to historical and cultural contexts, while also being amenable to transcultural application. The limited purpose of this particular paper is to argue in favour of a nuanced, yet analytical and transcultural, but most importantly *process-oriented* approach to the study of cuisines and food cultures.

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<sup>55</sup> “*Khulāṣat-i Mākūlāt u Mashrūbāt*”, MS NMI S.No.145, Acc. No. 96.479, ff. 21r-v.

<sup>56</sup> *Nusḵha-i Shāhjahānī*, p. 88.

<sup>57</sup> Titley, *The Nīmatnāma Manuscript*, facsimile MS ff. 20v, 29r, translation, pp. 12, 16.

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