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## Kashmiri Wazwan: A Multicultural Repository

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### Abstract

Besides its scenic beauty, Kashmir is also world famous for its cultural richness and heterogeneity in which the wedding ceremonies form an indispensable part. A Kashmiri wedding is full of many rituals and ceremonies. One of the unavoidable components of a Kashmiri wedding is the traditional feast called *Wazwan*.

Wazwan is the formal meal prepared on the occasion of a wedding. It is not merely a simple meal but can be treated as a ceremony in itself. A Wazwan consists of a variety of dishes and has incorporated items from many cultures like Indic, Arabic, Persian, Turkish, etc, from time to time.

In this backdrop the present paper aims to analyse the various culinary terms associated with a Kashmiri Wazwan which can truly be regarded as a multicultural repository.

Kashmir is world famous not only for its natural beauty but also for its cultural richness. It has been described as an ancient region possessing a distinct ethnicity, character, language, dress, customs, rituals and a rich cultural heritage. Its culture is very diverse, multicoloured and multifaceted.

One of the hallmarks of Kashmiri culture is its flexibility and inclusive nature which has always enabled it to synthesize various cultural streams to form a unique and composite

cultural entity that is ever widening. It is a brilliant blend of different ethnic groups and social entities, an amalgamation of numerous civilizations that have inhabited the Kashmir valley, from time to time, and have left their impression on the culture of Kashmir. It needs to be mentioned that during the past five thousand years of its history, Kashmiri has been at the crossroads of various civilizations and religions.

It has been highly influenced by Chinese, Indian, Central Asian and Persian civilizations and cultures. Kashmir is said to have had close trade and cultural relations with present day China, Tibet, many Central Asian cities, Afghanistan, Iran and even Europe via the famous silk route. On the religious front Kashmir has witnessed three great religions of the world, namely, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam.

All these factors have contributed immensely to the evolution and development of present day Kashmir and Kashmiri culture, of which the wedding ceremonies form an indispensable part. A Kashmiri wedding is full of many rituals and ceremonies. One of the unavoidable components of a Kashmiri wedding is the traditional feast called as *Wazwan*.

### **Wazwan**

*Wazwan* is the ultimate name in Kashmir banquet. It is the formal meal prepared on the occasion of a Kashmiri Muslim wedding. It is not merely a simple meal but can be treated as a ceremony in itself. It is a multi-course meal and the main ingredient of this meal is meat, though other elements like chicken, fish and vegetables are also there. The preparation and presentation of *Wazwan* is considered as an art, and the practising possessor of this art is known as 'waza' (chef).

### **VISUALISATION OF WAZWAN**



**Figure 1: Several Kashmiri Wazwan dishes**

The head of the cooking team is known as ‘*wusta waza*’ (master chef) with a number of assistants i.e. *wazas*, ranging from 5-20, assisting him. Like the conductor of an orchestra, the master chef (‘*wusta waza*’) directs and guides the team. With minimal talk, responsibilities are divided. One group cuts the meat, ensuring it is halal. The next lot sits in a row, pounding endlessly to tenderise it. The steady thud’s rhythm is surprisingly cohesive with the folk songs, also sung through the wedding. Another group does the blending, boiling and frying.

The basic prerequisite of a *wazwan* is that freshly slaughtered meat is used for its preparation, the quantity of which depends upon the number of guests to be invited and the number of dishes to be prepared. After acquiring the meat, the *Waza* sorts it out for the different types of dishes. For example, rib cage is used to make *Tabakhmaaz* while as boneless meat (which is grinded) is used in the preparation of *Rista* and *Goshtaba*. The entire *wazwan* is cooked on the firewood (*z’un*) which is burnt in *wuri*, a long furnace like structure made of bricks. *Wazwan* is prepared for the whole night in *deighs* (big copper cauldrons) and served in ‘*tramis*’ (big copper plates). A ‘*trami*’ is shared by four persons and is piled high with heaps of rice, decorated and quartered by four ‘*kababs*’ (minced mutton rolls), ‘*methi maaz*’ (meat mixture) at four places, two ‘*tabak maaz*’ (fried ribs of lamb) pieces, one *kokur* (chicken) and *daniphol* (meat piece).

The meal begins with invoking the name of Allah (SWT) and a ritual washing of hands with the help of the ‘*tash-t-nari*’ (jug and basin) that is passed among the guests, who are sitting around the *dastarkhan* (a long piece of cloth), after which the *tramis* are served to the guests.

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The boys in the family do all the carrying and serving, and the *wazas(chefs)* serves the dishes one by one in a sequence and uses a big ladle to put the dishes on the *tramis*. Then scalding chicken red curry served with a huge ladle is carefully poured on the rice, along with a huge meaty piece of chicken for each of the four people sitting around the plate. Next comes the tender *seekh kabaabs* followed by *Rogan josh*, fiery with red Kashmiri chilies, and then the delicious *tabakh maz*, (which are flat rib cuts cooked in spiced milk and then fried in pure ghee till they're dark and crackling) followed by delectably spongy *paneer* in a rich tomato sauce. *Goshtaba*, soft mutton meatballs cooked in gravy of fresh curd, ends the meal.

### Dishes in a Wazwan



**Figure 2: Preparing Wazwan for a Kashmiri wedding**

A number of dishes are prepared in a *wazwan*, some of which are given below:

1. *Saphed kokur or zafrani kokur* (chicken-white soup or dipped with Saffron)
2. *methi maaze* (meat mixture)
3. *Ristae* (mutton balls)
4. *Rogan josh* (tender meat of lamb)
5. *kufti* (minced mutton balls)
6. *Gaade kufta* (minced fish balls)
7. *Dhani phol* (meat piece)
8. *Tabakh maaz* (fried lamb ribs)
9. *Daniwal korma* (lamb in a yogurt-based gravy)

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- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 10. <i>Aab gosht</i>           | (lamb curry cooked in milk)                              |
| 11. <i>Marcha-wangan korma</i> | (lamb meat preparation with chilly-based gravy)          |
| 12. <i>Sheekh kabab</i>        | ( spicy ground lamb on skewers)                          |
| 13. <i>Yakhni</i>              | (meat prepared in curd)                                  |
| 14. <i>Goshtab</i>             | (soft mutton meat balls cooked in a gravy of fresh curd) |

Besides some vegetarian dishes also form a part of the *wazwan*. Some of them are as under:

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|---|---|
| 1. <i>Dum aaloo</i>                       | (a potato dish)   |
| 2. <i>Chuk wangan</i>                     | (brinjal with a sour gravy)   |
| 3. <i>Nadir yakk'in</i>                   | (yakhni made of lotus stems)  |
| 4. <i>Hak</i> (with <i>nadir/vangan</i> ) | (a local variety of greens)   |
| 5. <i>Nadir Palak</i>                     | (lotus stem with spinach)   |
| 6. <i>Tsaaman</i>                         | (cheese)  |
| 7. <i>Ruwangan Tsaaman</i>                | (cheese squares with Tomato gravy)                                    |
| 8. <i>laadir tsaaman</i>                  | (cheese in turmeric)  |
| 9. <i>Mujh Chetin</i>                     | (a sharp radish and walnut chutney)                                   |
| 10. <i>Kankich</i>                        | (mushroom)  |
| 12. <i>Aloo bukhaari</i>                  | (chutney made with fresh plums, onions, sugar, lime juice and spices) |

### **Important Seven Dishes of Wazwan**

One of the special features of *wazwan* is *polav* which is a sweet rice dish cooked in ghee along with a host of dry fruits. It needs to be mentioned here that a *wazwan* usually consists of 20 to 40 dishes. However, seven dishes form an inseparable part of a *wazwan* which include *tabakh maaz*, *rogan josh*, *rista*, *aab gosh*, *dhaniwal korma*, *marchawangan korma* and *goshtab*.

The meal is accompanied by yoghurt garnished with Kashmiri saffron, salads, Kashmiri pickles and dips. The feast ends with an elder leading the thanksgiving to Allah, which is heard with rapt attention by everyone. The serving of *Goshtaba*, the big soft round meat balls indicate the end of the feast. That is why people jokingly name *goshtaba* as full stop. It also needs to be mentioned that *wazwan* is eaten by hands without any spoons, forks or knives. *Phirni* and *halwa* are the common desserts usually served after meals. However, ice-creams are also used frequently now. Lately cold drinks have also become a regular feature of the feast.

### **Gracious Uses of Spices**



Kashmiri *wazwan* is quite famous for the gracious use of spices like *shonth* (dried ginger), *dalchini* (cinnamon), *elaichi* (cardamom), *laung*(cloves), *badyan* (fennel),etc. Spices used in Kashmiri *wazwan* give special taste and aroma to the food.

### **Multicultural Influences**

Kashmiri cuisine has a history that is spread over centuries and dates back to the last decades of the 14th century. Like other elements of culture, the cuisine of Kashmir has been influenced by different religio-civilizational currents, from time to time, that came into contact with Kashmiri culture. The Muslim missionaries of Central Asian cities and towns, who started migrating to the valley, were notably religious preachers. But most of them were trained weavers, woodcarvers, architects, calligraphers and cooks. The descendants of these cooks came to be known as "*wazas*", who are the master chefs of Kashmir. However, there has been a difference in opinion about the actual source of *Wazwan*.



**Figure 4: Goshtaba (mutton balls)**

In the words of Mohi-ud-din, A. (1989:133), “Wazwan is erroneously believed to have come from the Central Asian region. The names of some preparations like *roganjosh*, *kabab*, *tabakhmaaz*, etc., falsely suggest their origin like *Sadmakars* and *kete peers*, from that region. While *khebob* (the Uzbek for *kabab*) may be given the benefit of doubt other preparations are definitely the handiwork of the Kashmiri cook.”

Masoodi (1989:112) attributes many of the dishes in Wazwan to the Persian source. He mentions that the Kashmiri Wazwan, “which constitutes such delicious dishes like *yakhni*, *rista*, *qabab*, *tabakmaz*, *pulav*, *harisa*, *bakerkhani*, *nan* and pottery like *samawar*, *sarposh*, *bushzab*, *finjan*, *surahi*, *kashuk* etc. also found way in the valley for the first time during the period of Sultans and the credit for popularizing these dishes goes to Persian immigrants.”

Fayaz, F. (2001:192) has defined Wazwan in such a way as to highlight the equal influence of Sanskrit and Persian sources, and defines Wazwan as, “a feast prepared by professional chefs. The term ‘*waazi*’ is basically a Sanskrit term ‘*waje*’ which means to cook. Another theory with regard to the origin of the term is that it has been derived from ‘*ashpaaz*’ a Persian term that means a special cook proficient in making soups. The term with the passage of time became ‘*waza*’.”

Irrespective of the difference of opinion there is no doubt that the Kashmiri wazwan has been influenced by various cultural currents that have swept Kashmir from time to time. The

names of the dishes and the various spices used reflect Indic, Persian, Turkish, Arabic, Central Asian and Afghan influences.

### Origin of Some of the Dishes

An analysis about the origin of some of the dishes of Wazwan can be traced as follows:

<u>Dish</u>	<u>Source</u>
<i>Kabaab</i>	Arabic
<i>roganjosh</i>	Persian
<i>korma</i>	Turkish
<i>yakhi'n'</i>	Persian
<i>aabgosh</i>	Persian
<i>rista</i>	Persian
<i>goshtabi</i>	Persian
<i>pulaav</i>	Persian
<i>dum aaloo</i>	Indian
<i>halwa</i>	Arabic

The various spices used in the preparation of Wazwan suggest its Sanskrit influence like:

<i>Shonth</i> (dry ginger powder)	Sanskrit
<i>Kong</i> (saffron)	Sanskrit
<i>Rong</i> (clove)	Sanskrit
<i>Dachini</i> (cinnamon)	Sanskrit
<i>Mawual</i> (dry cockscomb flower)	Sanskrit

### The Effects of Modernization

The effects of modernisation are also highlighted in this famous feast of Kashmir, that is, Wazwan. A number of things have been added, and have become an important component, to Wazwan like ice creams, softies, sweets, and cold drinks.

### Conclusion

As is clear from the discussion Kashmiri Wazwan is a ceremony in itself. It has a long history and has got heavily influenced by various cultures till date. The influences and borrowings from Indian, Central Asian, Turkish, Persian and other cultures have made it a multicultural repository in true sense. However, its true flavour can be enjoyed only when one tastes it and not through a small paper like this.





**Figure 5: *Rista* (small mutton balls)**



**Figure 6: *Dhaniphol* (meat piece)**



## Figure 7: Wazwan trami (big plate with wazwan)

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### Colophon:

Revised version of the paper entitled ‘Kashmiri Wazwan: A Multicultural Repository’ presented in the National Seminar-cum-Workshop on ‘Historical and Socio-cultural Study of Culinary Terms in Indian Languages,’ Jointly organized by Department of Linguistics, AMU, Aligarh and Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore.

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