

Chandni Chowk

Kebab, Kulche aur Kahaniyan



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Discover India Program 2019-20

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report titled “*Chandni Chowk: Kebab, Kulche aur Kahaniyan*” submitted by the undersigned Research Team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

Chandni Chowk is an amalgamation of industries, from jewellery to wedding cards. In the recent decades, its fame for food has overshadowed its other businesses. The sudden popularity of food in the marketplace can be analysed through its historical encounters, and the tales of its shop-owners and consumers. For a research project that entails the understanding of a scarcely-documented region like Chandni Chowk, Oral History provides the best surface area for exploring the bazaar's untold stories, and the impacts of food culture on the development of the market space. Memory being the primary instrument for data collection, it seemed fitting to use it as a lens through which we gauged the composition of Chandni Chowk.

The following chapters outline the history and geographical information of the bazaar. It then articulates the current role of the government and the impact of conservation and tourism. This builds the foundation for the aesthetic of Chandni Chowk that has been maintained since 1947, thus encouraging businesses for comfort food, and legacy-building.

The analytical chapters have been divided based on the elements that have formed Chandni Chowk, that is, migration, memory, and authenticity. Migration is the mode of transportation of different cuisines, while memory facilitates the commercialization of food that reminds one of home, witnessed in the formation of migrant communities that have curated new cuisines amidst fading ones. Authenticity thus becomes vague because of its two-fold origin, one that belongs to the migrant community's first home, and the other that belongs to their current home - Old Delhi - that has passed down both recipes and shops through generations.

Our research objectives are framed based on these links. They aim to collect information, ranging from the role of migration and memory in shaping a culinary culture in Chandni Chowk, to the flexible definition of authenticity in such a setting. We seek to understand how authenticity has been moulded within the different narratives that now form the identity of the one and only Chandni Chowk.

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INTRODUCTION



Chapter 1: Introduction

To have two people reach a consensus over a meal is considered a feat. To reach an even greater consensus, over a seven-month-long research project, we consider an even higher deed. Fifteen students spread over myriad disciplines ranging from Applied Mathematics to Psychology narrowed down on Chandni Chowk as the area of study. Forty-plus articles, one documentary, and two residents of Delhi convinced us that Chandni Chowk deserved more documentation than what lived in the margins of scattered accounts. Confined to occasional mentions in travel blogs and articles, there was a clear lacuna in recorded history and Chandni Chowk's rich heritage. While Shahjahanabad as an amalgamation of *Havelis*, *mohallas*, *bazaars*, and places of worship had been efficiently recorded for its response to two empires- those of the Mughals, and the British Imperialists, Chandni Chowk seldom had the opportunity to claim its own narrative. With a transition between two distinct political forces, a closed space with dynamic religious communities, a name for street food- such as *Daulat ki Chaat*- and an eventual tourist hub, Chandni Chowk as a space had both endured and shaped itself to a history that was only half-known to us.

There is a certain currency that Chandni Chowk has come to acquire in the Indian context. After all, at the time of its inception, King Charles I had only recently been executed for treason, the onslaught of the *Great Plague of Seville* was still ongoing, and the Ottomans were violently trying to capture Crete from the Venetians. But there are older places in India which have withstood richer histories. Places that even fail to be bound by the shackles of time. Then why Chandni Chowk?

As a group, we collectively felt that the history of Chandni Chowk, unlike other spaces in India, was intrinsically tied to food, and that the culinary practices, culture, and food community of Chandni Chowk had had a great role to play in the advancement of Chandni Chowk to the echelons of India's culinary and cultural identity. With the literature that we read, consumed, analyzed and debated, we started developing a hunch that food had transformed and perpetuated the culinary and cultural ethos of Old Delhi, and that its historicity must be looked at from the lens of the development and culture of its food community.

That Chandni Chowk stood as a symbol of India's vibrant history and had been subsumed in the nation's lexicon of historical and culinary landmarks became increasingly clear to us with the kind of content that was available online, mostly fetishizing and exoticizing, with some naivete, its rich historicity, and "authentic" scrumptious delicacies. With a variety of theories, thoughts and assumptions, we were instantly invested in investigating the historicity and structure of Old Delhi from the standpoint of food. We wanted to be able to amass the cultural and culinary status of Old Delhi and how it took shape. There were innumerable questions of origin, geography, truth, memory, and culture.

Soon enough, it became evident that "investigating the history of Old Delhi from the standpoint of food" was a loose term which conveyed really, very little. It was the repository of the people of Chandni Chowk that would build a foundation for our study. With Oral History acting as the backbone of our thesis, and a somewhat material tool to nurture our curiosity and incessant reading, discussions, and contemplation helped us deconstruct this vague standpoint of food into more microscopic facets of a food community, the culture it builds, what that culture does to the spirit of Old Delhi and so on.

To gauge the growth and impact of Chandni Chowk's food culture on its spirit, our findings were categorized based on both concrete and abstract themes that would thus allow us to simultaneously commemorate the memories belonging to the people of the space, and construct an understanding of the geography of the *bazaar*. Memory, the interpretation of authenticity, and identity (be it communal or familial) would become methods for capturing the essence of food dynamism over the centuries, while migration and the structural layout of Chandni Chowk would map physical and geographical changes.

The ethos of Chandni Chowk is wrapped in cultural codes which inextricably link it to the unique space it occupies in history. To engage with the markets of Chandni Chowk is to revisit that very frame of history that is more or less still mired and married to its seventeenth-century roots. Recipes have carried bits of those historic legacies down to the twenty-first century, in the form of *Nagori Halwa* and *Daulat ki Chaat* having survived a fading cuisine, gravies that are synonymous with a younger, migrated crowd, and *galis* that still host restaurants passed down through generations.

The anatomy of this report starts at the history and geography of Chandni Chowk as embedded in Shahjahanabad, and branches out into the themes of migration, authenticity, and memory, intersecting at points to narrate small but powerful stories of shop-owners and food vendors who bear aspects of their legacies to us. Finally, these convergences culminate into a picture that records the food community of Chandni Chowk as a flavorful tale of resistance, historicity, heritage, and love.

LITERATURE REVIEW



Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature that we examined for the purpose of this project may be classified into the following broad emerging themes: Setting the Context of Chandni Chowk, the Community and its Relationship with Food; Food, Memory and Identity; and Authenticity and the Preservation of Culture. This forms the dominant subject matter of this chapter.

Before we dive into the material nuances of the literature surveyed, it is also pertinent that we, as student researchers, candidly state our role in this research project. First and foremost, and quite obviously, we are students. We say this to remind ourselves that this is not the space for pompous, unqualified and naïve claims or analyses, nor is it the space for our own often privileged and young predispositions. Second, comes our role as researchers, but the onus of being one has thoroughly been explicated in the previous chapter. That saves the last and primal role: One of the critics. It is not owing to our academic orientation (predominantly humanities and social sciences) that we are invariably inclined to assume the role of critics. We believe the role of a critic is larger than to deride and deconstruct; that in the capacity of critics, our role is also to build a culture around our object of research and to create and construct as much as to question and ask.

Though we found extensive literature on the history and evolution of Chandni Chowk and Old Delhi, there was very little on the culinary history of Chandni Chowk. Much of our readings and ensuing analysis involved extrapolating global theories and trends of memory, migration and authenticity of foods and foodways to the predominantly historical, geographical and spatial data available with regard to Chandni Chowk.

I. Setting the Context of Chandni Chowk, the Community and its Relationship with Food

In *Fusion of Traditional and Modern Principles of Design for Public Spaces of Indian Cities* (2018), Gangwar argues that a diverse range of activities come to fore on a single street. Thereby, the street becomes a microcosmic yet successful representation of the diverse range of characters and identities that a public space occupies. Due to a multitude of histories

that Chandni Chowk has stood witness to, including those of the Mughal and British era, it has come to represent a variety of masses and their cultures.

One of the landmark events that later defined the culinary scope of Chandni Chowk was the decline of royal patronage which led to the fragmentation of *Havelis*. Overnight, the labour employed within the *Havelis* were robbed of their livelihood. This led to similarly skilled professionals forming guilds to promote and secure their jobs. The cooks of these *Havelis* also turned to guilds, which became a new source of employment and security (Hosagrahar, 2001). Thus, food that was confined to the private space of *Havelis* suddenly arrived at the public scene of Chandni Chowk.

By the late 19th Century, *Havelis* began being rebuilt and restructured by the royal classes to match the British architecture. This emulation was emblematic of the Indian aspiration to acquire a stake in the colonial authority and partake in its lifestyle. However, the *Haveli* system was overall in decline which led to radical changes in the landscape of Chandni Chowk (Hosagrahar, 2001). Whether a similar colonial influence extended to the culinary culture of Chandni Chowk became one of our research concerns, which shall be addressed in the chapters to come.

Perhaps the greatest influence that dramatically altered the prevailing cuisine of Chandni Chowk was that of the Partition. In *Partition Changed India's Food Culture Forever* (2017), writer Anoothi Vishal states how there was a radical shift from Mughlai cuisine to Punjabi flavours in all of Delhi. The traditional yoghurt and spice-based foods were soon replaced by tomato-onion gravies. *Tandoori* foods and cuisine were soon capitalized on and commodified in every nook and corner of Delhi, including Chandni Chowk. Post Partition, many of the small shops specializing in typical Mughlai dishes started disappearing, for the maestros who had mastered their techniques were too gone, and numerous cafes and restaurants completely omitted British-inspired foods from their menus. According to numerous scholars, the echoes of resentment of the “Punjabification” of their culinary practices and culture can still be found within the heart of Old Delhi.

Chaitanya Kanuri and Jayesh Ganesh argue in *Resilience Through Urban Flexibility* (2013) that within the story of food in Chandni Chowk there lies a story of resistance. They state how numerous food places in Chandni Chowk are centuries old and have been resilient

both, structure and the identity of the food they serve. It is this very narrative of resistance to change that we seek to explore and examine.

II. Food, Memory, and Identity

In *Writing the Wolf Away* (2004), Meryl S. Rosofsky makes a fascinating claim. She argues that food holds a certain kind of transcendental power, as a means and symbol of hopefulness in times both good and bad. The role of food only begins in consumption and satiating hunger. In fact, food is a crucial means of reimagining and immortalizing a past, as a means of clinging on to one's identity. She gives the example of several recipes being shared and formed by the women of Concentration Camps at Terezín. Though recipes never materialised into foods, they were an essential symbol of hope and memory, entailing a profoundly humanizing effect.

Alana Claxton in *Cooking Lessons: Oral Recipe Sharing in the Southern Kitchens* (2019) states that food is an essential indicator of how societies form, structure and change on the basis of caste, religion, and race. Food is also material in privileging an individual's subjectivity, context and sense of self. People's identities are both constructed and manifested through food. The idea of a recipe in the preservation of a particular custom, time and space is also crucial to understand the relationship between food and identity.

Food does not exist in a vacuum. The practice of production and consumption of food remains inextricably linked to the context of a community. Food moves along with communities, and the experiences of these communities are linked to the food that they make and consume. These memories are closely associated with people's identities (Holtzman, 2006).

Public spaces perform an essential role of adding to the character and experience of a city as people from all walks of life congregate to walk, shop and eat. If this holds true, then Chandni Chowk remains indelible to the character and soul of Old Delhi, where several of its shops and markets have attained the status of institutions that have continued to prevail (Gangwar, 2018; Kanuri & Ganesh, 2013).

In her meditation on Old Delhi titled *A Heart City: Celebrating the Pulsating Lifestyles of the Walled City of Delhi* (2018), Olivia Biswas mentions how Chandni Chowk sits at the heart of Delhi and pumps life to the rest of the city. Somehow, she believes that the

three hundred and fifty-year-old Chandni Chowk has withstood the test of time and continues to thrive, never letting go of its character. Employing food as a lens to examine this prevalence of culture, Biswas (2018) writes how food is one of the most important identity markers of Chandni Chowk, and in effect, the walled city of Delhi.

III. Authenticity

It is often argued that though Delhi has undergone a range of temporal changes, Chandni Chowk has managed to “preserve” much of the city’s heritage and culture and has retained its status as the cultural hub of the city (Kanuri & Ganesh, 2013). However, this contentious claim must be problematized, for the notion of preservation presupposes a certain timelessness to a particular culture and tradition.

Questions of authenticity have long plagued scholars, who occupy a whole spectrum of positions. Some argue that the quest for authenticity is a specious one, while others argue that there are invariably some fundamental structures around which food predicates itself and yet others who believe that it is no more than a marketing gimmick and will forever be an epistemological mystery.

In her seminal work *What was Mughal Cuisine: Defining and Analysis a Culinary Culture* (2016), Divya Narayanan presents both sides of the coin. She gives the example of Levi Strauss, a structural anthropologist, to examine the structuralist approach to food and cuisine. She states how Strauss studied cuisine as being composed of definite units of taste called *gusteme*, and used linguistics as a metaphor to analyse cuisine. Most structuralist scholars study the symbolism of food from the lens of metaphors, grammar, and code. French anthropologist Francis Zimmerman posits that at the core of every Indian meal is bread or rice, while vegetable, curry, and meat occupy its periphery.

However, and rightfully so, there have been numerous critiques of the structuralist approach. Narayanan (2016) herself writes that food must be studied in evolutionary terms, as a structuralist approach presumes the existence of an “authentic” culture and a stagnancy to food culture itself. Though the approach can identify food as a key temporal, spatial and historical marker, it does not account for changes within. For instance, a dish like *khichdi* mentioned in Indo-Persian cookbooks was often meant for an elite audience. However, the

status of *khichdi* radically changed as it soon started becoming a staple for people in Northern and Western parts of India.

Lizzie Collingham too, in *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (2006) states that authenticity becomes an issue fraught with contradictions in a land such as India's, with a range of variables including regionality, colonialism, and preparation.

Numerous works of literature also indicated how the flag of authenticity is co-opted by markets to exoticize and romanticize their foods. Moreover, even the identity and history of Old Delhi is appropriated by other urban and elite markets to cater to various class codes and systems of consumers. In *Delicious Delhi: Nostalgia, Consumption and the Old City* (2015), Ajay Gandhi writes, "The fetishizing of certain iconic neighbourhoods as authentic, and the legitimacy accorded to those partaking of 'original' spaces, shows how nostalgia underwrites class formation. Indeed, as India has globalised and liberalised, it has witnessed the hectic redefining and cannibalising of historical, folk and classical forms" (p. 348). In a neo-liberal, post-1990s, urban middle-class framework, the nostalgic value, and heritage of Old Delhi are neatly wrapped, co-opted and appropriated by newer neighbourhoods. These are then peddled and sold as a marker of cultural superiority and class codes to the middle class and urban elites in sanitised spaces and with an admission fee. Thus, nostalgia becomes commodified into a cultural symbol and is sold as a luxury item in private spheres away from 'undesirable' classes and 'unhygienic' neighbourhoods.

Gaps in the literature

As previously mentioned, there was very little information available that directly addressed the issues that we as a team were interested in. Data and research on the culinary facets of Chandni Chowk were far and few between. Notions of memory, authenticity and migration remained mostly untapped. And although the aforementioned literature addressed these issues, the lens was geographically, historically and culturally different, never directly applicable to Chandni Chowk. The research pertaining to food in Chandni Chowk was mostly blog/vlog driven, limited only to the taste and history of the food and was not looked at from an academic standpoint.

Though the literature we found posited that Old Delhi occupied a material position in India's history, none answered just how or what it exactly was. The colonial and migratory impacts on the cultural identity of Old Delhi were also yet to be navigated. We were also curious about the role that food occupied in cultivating a community spirit and constructing a culinary and cultural identity, to delve deeper into the relationship and position of food in the consciousness of Chandni Chowk. Given the large influx of migrants to Chandni Chowk, we were also interested in unravelling the influence of migration on food, and how the memory intrinsic to migration processes shaped culinary practices. Some of the other key gaps, which helped us shape our research objectives are:

1. What is it about food that makes it such an inherent part of in Old Delhi's culture and identity?
2. Old Delhi has borne witness to many moments of crisis. How has food, in such circumstances, been a symbol of hope and/or resistance?
3. How does food help a migrated community to hold on to its roots and cultural heritage?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



Chapter 3: Research Methodology

I. Research Questions

1. How has migration shaped the culinary culture of Chandni Chowk?
2. How does memory serve as a foundation for the foodways of Chandni Chowk?
3. Is the framework of authenticity applicable to the cuisine of Chandni Chowk? Is it implied within the food community? If so, how is it implied, and what are the factors which affect its implication?

In answering these questions, our research attempts to explore the crucial role that food has played in shaping and maintaining the cultural identity of Chandni Chowk.

II. Research Method - Qualitative

The area of our study (food in Chandni Chowk) is highly dynamic. Food, culture, community, memory and identity are constantly in flux and involve multiple variables. The objectives of our study seek descriptive data along these themes and cannot be measured quantitatively. Therefore, the outcomes of our study are highly subjective and focus on observations, experiences and narratives. Hence, in order to satisfy the objectives of our research, we considered qualitative methods to be the most suitable.

III. Sample Selection

Our sample consists of three categories: Food vendors, consumers, and academicians. The reason that we decided to incorporate these three categories in our study is in order to gain a holistic understanding of Chandni Chowk's food community from the experiences and perspectives of different participants of the community itself, the vendors and consumers being direct members of the Chandni Chowk food community, and the academicians being detailed observers. Furthermore, we broke the sample into these categories to observe trends within each group.

We conducted interviews with the producers and consumers in the Chandni Chowk area with a total of 25 vendors/owners and 10 consumers. Our understanding and analysis about the identities of the various stakeholders, and their link with Chandni Chowk's food has been derived from the narratives that they shared with us. We conducted structured interviews with four academicians who live in Delhi and have specialised in either food studies or in the history of Shahjahanabad.

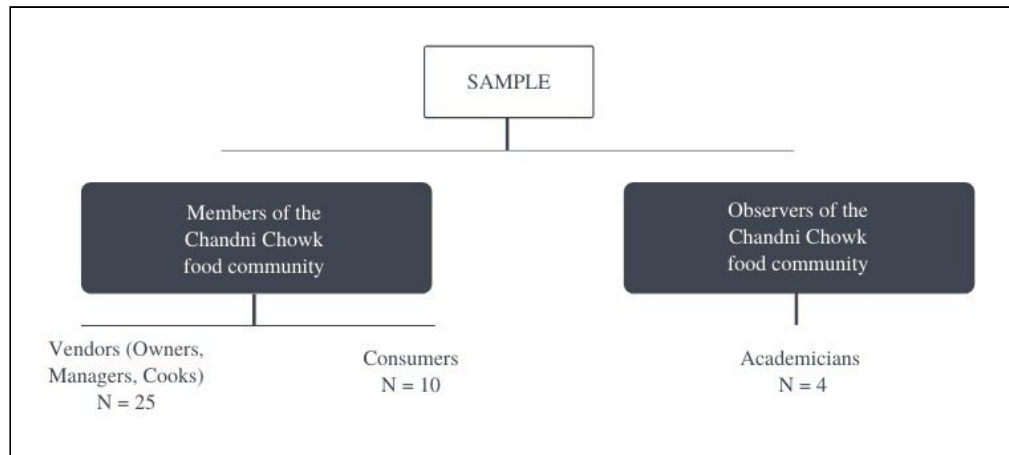


Figure 1: Research Sample

IV. Data Collection Method and Tools

For the purpose of this study, we used structured and semi-structured interviews, oral histories and non-participant observation.

We used semi-structured interviews to collect descriptive data about Chandni Chowk. This format allowed us to incorporate questions based on our observations, and pursue the narratives on this basis. Oral history was a means for us to construct a larger and more inclusive chronology of Chandni Chowk which largely consisted of undocumented stories of the vendors. Through non-participant observation, we were able to gauge the relationship between the food community and the market space of Chandni Chowk.

V. On-field Research Process

Being a group of fifteen members in the expanse of Chandni Chowk and its dense crowd, it would not have been feasible, let alone practical, for us to conduct our research and interviews together. Hence, we identified the primary locations for our research and divided them based on geographical convenience. This was also helpful considering the changes in food patterns across the geographical space of Chandni Chowk. We marked the spaces into areas near Lal Quila, or Red Fort, the areas near Fatehpuri Masjid, and the areas near Jama Masjid, along the periphery of Chandni Chowk.

In order to cover these areas, we created subgroups for each day and each area on the basis of language proficiency, documentation, travel, and safety concerns.

Within the subgroups, a few members interviewed the vendors, while the others interviewed the consumers at those shops and took notes. The documentation happened parallelly, depending on necessity. Appointments were scheduled with the academicians who were interviewed separately by the literature team.



Map 1: Geographical Area Covered in Chandni Chowk

(Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi [Map], 2020)

VI. Data Analysis

After compiling the notes and transcribing audio recordings of the interviews, we began coding according to the major themes of our research. These were: historical context, space and structure, memory, identity, community, foodways, and authenticity. In grouping our data under these themes, we were able to recognise patterns in the narratives, and infer them to answer our research questions. .

VII. Ethical Considerations

In a place like Chandni Chowk, it was important that we were mindful of the cultural and religious context and diversity of the area. We made a conscious attempt to remain informed and understanding of this. We refrained from asking sensitive questions unless the interviewee was comfortable. We made sure to obtain informed consent from the participants

before conducting the interviews and assured to respect their requests of anonymity or confidentiality if they wished for the same. In addition to this, we attempted to respect the time of the vendors and consumers of the food community in Chandni Chowk, especially because it is an extremely busy market place. We abstained from asking leading questions to fulfil our research objectives.

Post our on-field research, we ensured that in our data storage, compilation, and analysis, we maintained confidentiality and did not risk exposing the information of the participants to anybody outside of the group.

VIII. Research Limitations

Limitations in Sample:

With respect to gender, our sample is skewed in favour of men. Unfortunately, the space of Chandni Chowk, including but not restricted to food stalls, is primarily populated by men. Over the course of our time on-field, we scarcely came across women vendors. Only two of them were willing to speak to us, out of which only one gave us information related to our research. Among the consumers, in group interviews, men dominated the conversation and in individual interviews, women were either unwilling or hesitant to participate.

Limitations in Data Collection:

1. As a group, we had to grapple with the clear and overwhelming male-majority of Chandni Chowk's population. Interviews were difficult to conduct because the vendors often only addressed the men of the group, ignoring the women. Some of them addressed the women of the group in a hostile manner.
2. Many vendors were reluctant to reveal aspects of their identity, and stories about migration. They were apprehensive that it may compromise their safety or well-being. Therefore, questions about migration, especially relating to the partition, had to be dealt with sensitively or avoided altogether in some cases.

WHERE DID YOU GO DAULAT RAM?



Chapter 4: Where Did You Go Daulat Ram?

At the very outset, each of us participating in this endeavour knew that at some level it amounted to an oral history project. While that term remained rather elusive, we knew that the onus was tremendous. Documenting and recording history makes you not only a stakeholder in that narrative but also, simultaneously, an author, a custodian and a bearer. The loaded negotiation with historiography is instantly born. The responsibility is to be true to your interviewee's subjectivity, context, story and most importantly, personal truth.

Oral history projects are often undertaken to capture a particular frame of history. This method is used by a gamut of historians, culture theorists, sociologists and anthropologists to gain a more nuanced, subjective understanding of how individuals shape history and the impact and impression of past events on individuals. While such information gathering-processes themselves may not have the veracity that official records and documents do, that is often the purpose of such a methodology, wherein the subjectivity and positionality of an individual are privileged. The idea is to document and record a memory, an incident, some anecdote that allows us as researchers to decipher a particular historical account.

Owing to the vastly subjective nature of our methodology, we knew that the narratives we were made party to *would* contradict, clash, obfuscate and oppose. But with the earnest hope that those narratives would also create, construct and corroborate, we started our journey with the canon of culinary delicacies whose aromas wafted enticingly through the nooks and corners of Chandni Chowk.

Daulat ki Chaat is an uncanny mixture of milk and cream and dry fruits and *khoya*. That it sits at the top of the culinary canon of Chandni Chowk cuisine can be attested to by talkative shopkeepers, erudite experts, and even some overzealous tourists. The *chaat* itself is not your quintessential *puri*, *sev*, curd, spices, and gallons of chutney, but is christened so for its ice-cream like virtue, that it demands to be licked from a spoon. Thus, the suffix *chaat*, which literally means "to lick".

The reasons we chose to begin our on-field research with *Daulat ki Chaat* were simple. It *belongs* to Chandni Chowk. It was sold in other places with different names but we were told upon arrival and prior, that *Daulat ki Chaat* is synonymous to Chandni Chowk.

That one could lay their hands on *paranths*, *naans*, and even *gajar ka halwa* elsewhere but that *Daulat ki Chaat* was Chandni Chowk's own. And so, we began.



Image 1: Daulat ki Chaat

The narratives surrounding *Daulat ki Chaat* varied in terms of its preparation, history and even nomenclature.

On our first day, we met four vendors. Sunil, the man at our first stop, was quite reticent about his “specialty” item. However, he did tell us that his father taught him how to make it, who was in turn taught by Khemchand, the man responsible for the enormous success of the *chaat* in Chandni Chowk, who happened to be a distant relative. When asked about its recipe, he just said milk, cream, and *khoya*. As far as its name went, he said that the *chaat* was named upon its eponymous founder from Uttar Pradesh, a certain Daulat Ram (Sunil, personal communication, February 9, 2020).

A scrumptious meal of the cult, *chhole kulche* at Lotan Chole-Kulche Waala led us to our next vendor, who preferred to retain his anonymity. He told us how he had come from Moradabad. On Sundays, he usually kept his stall around Lotan, only till noon as Lotan shut. He then moved instantly to the corner around Old Famous Jalebi Wala. On weekdays he was

constantly on the move. He told us that he would stay up all night churning the milk and allowing the dew to seep in. His father, who was taught by his neighbour, passed down the recipe to him.

Right outside Shyam Sweets stood two more sellers, both brothers, also from Moradabad, employing the ditto modus operandi. They too claimed that they were taught by Khemchand in Nayi Gali.

Upon hearing these narratives, it soon became imperative that we meet Khemchand. On our second day on-field, we had a chance to have a brief conversation with him. Our conversation was curt and he refused to be recorded or shot. He told us categorically that he was the one who popularized *Daulat ki Chaat* in Chandni Chowk and was one of its, if not the, most renowned vendors. He believed other vendors used his name only to boost their sales, and use his popularity to their advantage. He even felt they used it just for fun, for conversation's sake after having seen many of his interviews being broadcast and televised (K. Kumar, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Khemchand told us that he had learnt the recipe and method of preparing *Daulat ki Chaat* by his elder cousin, whom he referred to as *Ustaad*, who had in turn been taught by his grandfather. According to him, the name *Daulat ki Chaat* came to be because it was a dish meant solely for the consumption of the kings and rulers of the time. He also mentioned how light and foamy it was, and how its very inability to fill people up turned it into a luxury dish. Unwilling to reveal any further information, he gave us the details of his son Aadesh and asked us to speak with him.

We had an extensive conversation with Aadesh that very afternoon, who told us a diverse set of stories, ranging from where *Daulat ki Chaat* was sold to its exposition to Delhi.

He told us how he had been selling *Daulat ki Chaat* for the past seven or eight years in Chandni Chowk, how his father had taught him everything, and how his father was also responsible for the monumental success that *Daulat ki Chaat* has attained in Delhi. "He has even put it on Google," laughed Aadesh as he fixed the clips over the thin white net protecting his *chaat*.

He proudly told us that his father had been setting his stall since 1988, prior to which he used to help out his uncle. Today, the men in the family including him, his younger

brother and father run three independent stalls while his father's five brothers and other relatives have their own stalls in and around Chandni Chowk. When it came to Delhi, he was clear to proclaim that *Daulat ki Chaat* was an item sold exclusively in Chandni Chowk (A. Kumar, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Interestingly, Aadesh also mentioned how no encroachment was encouraged or even allowed as far as the locations of the stalls were concerned. When his father branched out and set up his stall in Kinari Bazaar, he was adamant in disallowing his brothers to set up their own stalls in his vicinity. The locations were all neatly divided. This possibly had links to the sellers' consumer base too. As Aadesh pointed out, his customers had not changed in the past ten years and he often recognized most of his regular customers who frequented his stall a few times a week. We asked him if the recipes were different and he told us it was inevitable for recipes and cooking methods to change.

Fascinating also was how Aadesh and the entire community of vendors selling *Daulat ki Chaat* only sold it in the four months of winter. "Otherwise it starts melting soon," said Aadesh. For numerous consumers, this augmented the novelty of the product.

"Why Chandni Chowk?" we asked him towards the end of our interview. Upon being asked the sole elemental question our entire research was founded on, he coolly responded, "It's like this in Chandni Chowk. Only old-timers eat this. This is an item of kings and rulers. First, they only used to consume it. After that, it came to the markets to be sold. It used to be sold early in the morning till around 10 am. Now it sells throughout the day." We decided to probe further and asked him, "Why not Jama Masjid?" He coolly retorted, "Those who eat for five-ten rupees do not really eat this. This is a *mota bazaar*, rich people come here, it is theirs only. *Daulat ki Chaat* is for wealthy people as it is quite expensive."

The stories surrounding the genesis of *Daulat ki Chaat* are as diverse as fascinating. Aadesh had his own version. He said that *Daulat ki Chaat* was a dish meant for kings. When Delhi became Capital, there was no one there to prepare it, so cooks moved from Lucknow just for that purpose. His father's *ustaad*, Lala Jahmal, was taught by his grandfather who was related to those cooks and that was how it had been passed. Generation after generation.

We culminated our conversation by telling him how we had picked up a casual conversation with some of the shop owners of the *parantha* shops in Paranthi Wali Gali and

how they keenly mentioned that paranthas were both a matter of identity and pride to them. We asked him if he ever thought about passing this legacy to his kids.

“Of course this is a matter of identity! This is a talent that I have inherited. I thank my father. Without him *kaha hote kaha nahi hote pata nahi kuch* (we do not know where we would be without him),” he laughed.

...

We mentioned this before. The reason for choosing *Daulat ki Chaat* was simple. It belongs to Chandni Chowk. But if you have read carefully, probability dictates that you have already picked up on some missing links, some contradictions, and many, many blank spaces. Let us revisit some of the claims made. Sunil, Khemchand and all the other vendors insisted that the recipe of *Daulat ki Chaat* hailed from Moradabad, while Aadesh implied that the recipe originated in Delhi (the rulers seemed to be relishing it since time immemorial) but the workers came from Lucknow. Implied here is the question of history, migration, and memory. Then, Sunil said that the recipe of *Daulat ki Chaat* was universal, with milk, cream, *khoya* and dry fruits as its only components. But his *chaat* had a distinct flavour of rose. None of the other dishes did. Things get more fascinating, when each vendor, including Aadesh, stated that he was Khemchand’s protégé, related to him whilst Khemchand categorically denied any such claims, arguing that he only had two sons and no other relatives in Chandni Chowk. What happens then to the question of authenticity (Though many of vendors share Khemchand’s surname, Kumar)?

There is a story that insists *Daulat ki Chaat* is named after its original founder, Daulat Ram. There is a story that also insists *Daulat ki Chaat* is named so because it shares a philosophical relationship with money. Like money dissolves when in people’s hands, the *chaat* melts in people’s mouths. And yet there is another story that insists, with equal fervour, that *Daulat ki Chaat* can only be purchased by the elite few, thus the name. We argue that examining the veracity of each of these stories is not as essential an affair as striving to discern what factors historicize these tales and myths, and what they, in turn, tell us about the interlinkage of history, migration, authenticity, and memory.

THE HISTORY OF CHANDNI CHOWK



Chapter 5: The History of Chandni Chowk

The history of Chandni Chowk hides in lengthy accounts of the Mughal period, amongst mentions of famous streets and *bazaars*. With almost no independent documentation dedicated to this curious expanse, Chandni Chowk's development can largely be traced through the establishment of Delhi, as a political and economic centrifugal point. Its popularity as a powerful political entity was in conjunction with its desirability as an '*Axis Mundi*', the meeting place of heaven and earth.

The current capital of India played its role as the seat of the Mughal Empire, and after 1947 as the centre for State governance. The archaic parts of Delhi were branded Old Delhi, while the British deemed India's new capital New Delhi, "But before 1912, it was Shahjahanabad, or Jahanabad" (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 13, 2020). Old Delhi was not a city of its own but rather a culmination of smaller cities that had been created over centuries of rule. In 1639, Emperor Shahjahan impressed upon his subjects the creation of a new city which would immortalize his name and legacy; Shahjahanabad was thus completed in 1648 and remained the capital of the Mughal Empire until its decline.

Spatial elements were inspired by both Hindu and Islamic guidelines for architecture; such as the bow-like shape, "The Manasara, a *vastu sastra* dating to about 400-600 A.D., contains a semi-elliptical design called *karmuka* or bow for a site fronting a river or seashore" (Acharya, 1927). As a result, Chandni Chowk seemed to recreate the shape of an archer's arm. While Hindu traditions framed the periphery of Shahjahanabad, Islamic (especially Iranian) influences were visible in the importance given to poetry, dance, music, and art. The religious diversity was evident in the contrast between a Hindu population ruled by a Muslim Empire, at the heart of a Hindu-majority subcontinent. Presently, the cohesive survival of these communities in a single space shows itself in the food that has consequently survived as well. While Punjabi cuisine has dominated the market post-partition, it has left room for historical Mughlai dishes to hold their legacies in Old Delhi.

Shahjahanabad's pride lay (amongst its *Havelis* and mosques) in its *bazaars*. The geographical extent of Chandni Chowk spanned from "Shahjahan's palace-fortress, the head, and ran to the Jami Masjid, the heart, and exited at the Kashmiri gate" (Blake, 1991). Its name was derived from the rather romantic sight of reflections of moonlight on the central

pool on rare nights. Thus Moonlight/Silver Square was deemed characteristic of the *bazaar's* identity.

Shahjahanabad's major bazaars such as Sa'adullah Khan Chowk, and Chandni Chowk catered to the upper classes of society, owing to the prominence of stalls that sold books, paintings, indigo, leather, and other fine goods. In fact, Chandni Chowk and other prominent markets were known not for their cuisines but for their artefacts - saris, jewellery, and books. It was only after 1947 that Chandni Chowk developed a significant market for street food. However, the presence of the Jama Masjid made available Mughal cuisine in the perpendicular streets. Kebabs, sweets, and chicken dishes were accessible at the Southern Gate. Marked Gate number 1 now, it faces Chandni Chowk's most famous non-vegetarian restaurants, not limited to Al Jawahar and Karim's.

The 18th century is considered a period of instability in Shahjahanabad, with the diminishing presence of the Mughal Empire's authority, and the start of a new rule viz-a-viz the East India Company. Chandni Chowk's first exposure to violence began with Emperor Nadir Shah's invasion of India and subsequently Delhi. In 1739, he settled down in the fortress and initiated a drain of the city's wealth. "His men were billeted throughout the area and, when a disturbance arose over grain prices, it was difficult for them to regroup and make a stand. In the violence that swept the city, several hundred of Nadir's men were slain" (Blake, 1991). In response, Nadir Shah's army rampaged through the bazaars and torched shops and houses. Personal accounts, such as the diary of Dargah Quli Khan, describes the atmosphere of the bazaars as unscathed by the pillage; he recalls the continuation of celebrations of *Holi* and *Basant*, the poetry and music of artisans, and Chandni Chowk "still brimming with expensive goods procured from all over the world and its Qahwa Khanas (Coffee Houses) [were] full of poets reciting their verses and eliciting praise from their audiences" (Rashid, 2017).

The transition from Mughal to British rule was facilitated by the establishment of the East India Company. They allowed the administrative functioning of the Mughal Empire (although it was already on the decline) while focusing their interests on the commercial aspects of India. However, after the wars of 1757 (Battle of Plassey) and 1764 (Battle of Buxar) they had made it clear that they would be pursuing political goals alongside their commercial exploits. Under the guise of employing British residents, they began to expand

their jurisdiction. “Beginning in 1792, the Company eventually induced some fifty-five states to agree by treaty to channel all foreign political contacts through the Residents” (Lee-Warner, 1910). By 1857 the East India Company had taken over affairs in the country. In 1858, the British Crown formally took over the State through the Government of India Act.

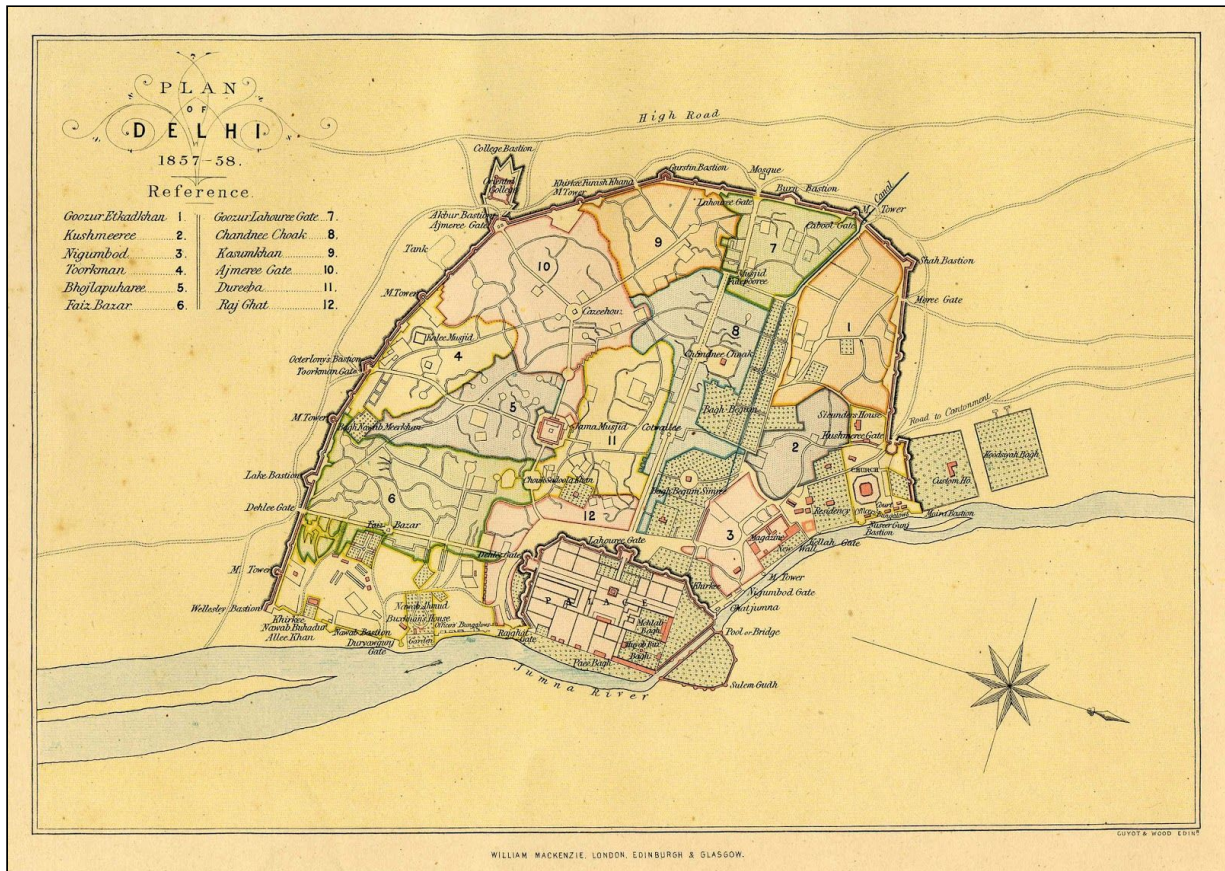
1857 and 1947 were significant periods with reference to visible changes in Shahjahanabad, and even more specifically in Chandni Chowk. Briefly, the bazaars of Shahjahanabad were milked of their jewellery and other valuable artefacts. Slabs of marble, tiles, and land were stolen and sold, and buildings and monuments were left barren. Simultaneously, civilians targeted the British and their architectural modifications of the city. In the process of destroying British quarters, *bazaars* and churches were demolished, shops were burned, and people were evicted. *Havelis*, which held integral spaces started to disappear. These mansions, that were scattered throughout the streets of Shahjahanabad faded with the decline of the Mughal Empire, and their royal class. In 1857 after the revolt, the British retaliated by destroying or selling land that had been occupied by mansions, orchards, and gardens. Jyoti Hosagrahar (2001) writes:

From extensive neighbourhood-like quarters in the early nineteenth century, the *haveli* of the well-to-do were reduced, a half-century later, to modest spaces around two or three small courtyards. Today, these mid-nineteenth century *haveli* exist only as barely recognizable skeletal remains. (2001)

The destruction of *Havelis* moved cooks, workers, and other service providers to the public sphere, where they practised their craft detached from the upper classes. *Bazaars* were claimed as spaces for them to run businesses in the wake of their previous work collapsing. Guilds were created by these artisans, which eventually resembled market spaces. The shift of cooks from *Havelis* to guilds brought Mughlai food into more accessible areas of Shahjahanabad, moving food from the private to the public sphere.

1947 proved to be an equally challenging year and the start of a migration movement that would also impact the dynamic of food in Delhi. In 1947, the partition triggered mass migration in the North of India. An influx of Punjabis in Delhi changed the flavours and techniques of cooking the food. The detailed impact of the Partition on food and the

administrative and economic changes of Old Delhi will be discussed in the following analytical chapters. Post-partition changes will be explored through the articulation of the structure of Chandni Chowk, its political atmosphere, and the tourism agenda.



Map 2: Plan of Delhi 1857 - 1858

(Jain, A. K. "The Significance of Shahjahanabad and Lutyens' Delhi." (2016). International Journal of Environmental Studies, 4th ed., vol. 73, p. 3. Taylor & Francis Online)

GEOGRAPHICAL AND STRUCTURAL LAYOUT OF CHANDNI CHOWK



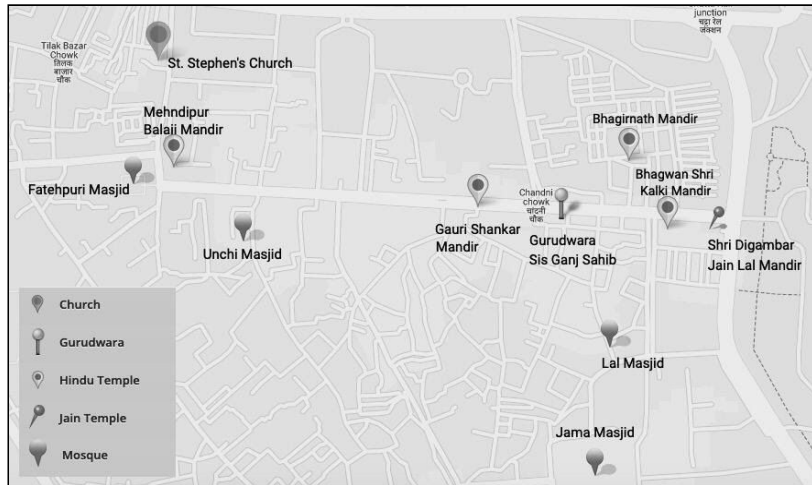
Chapter 6: Geographical and Structural Layout of Chandni Chowk

Chandni Chowk is considered to be one of India's most meticulously planned public complexes. However, what started as a one-and-a-half kilometre stretch beginning at the Lal Quila on the east and stretching until the Fatehpuri Masjid at its western end, has expanded into a larger area, encompassing several market spaces and *galis* around it. Old maps and black-and-white sketches of Shahjahanabad and its bazaars provide a rough outline of Chandni Chowk, but its true expanse cannot be fathomed until visitation. Based on observation and existing literature, as well as its marked change after 1947, and current status, we attempt to lay out the structure of Chandni Chowk vis-a-vis its food joints and overall culinary practice.

The layout of Chandni Chowk is characterized by places of worship, textile vendors, and the placement of famous shops, around which the dynamism of tourism and residential spaces shape themselves. The peripheries of the Chandni Chowk main street are lined with several places of worship, including gurdwaras, churches, mosques, and temples, therefore, inviting a regular population from different culinary backgrounds. The Jama Masjid, perhaps one of the most iconic monuments of Old Delhi, is only a short distance south of the Red Fort. Alongside, are famous clothing and textile market lanes, such as the Kinari bazaar and Meena bazaar. The centre is concentrated with spice markets, street food shops, raw material suppliers and small convenience stores. Grouped according to their line of commerce, there are clusters of shops topped with lavish laces and beads, interspersed with *Daulat ki Chaat* vendors, *pav bhaji* and *chhole* stalls, and sweet shops. Paranthewali Gali is a short perpendicular alley that houses the oldest parantha shop-owners, dating back to the mid-twentieth century.

The nature of street food prepared and served in Chandni Chowk is dependent on its surroundings. Different communities congregate around different places of worship, thereby making the target audiences of the vendors dependent on the places of worship present within the vicinity of their shops. In response to the communities around a particular area, food joints have been organized into vegetarian and non-vegetarian. The type of cuisine available also varies. The Chandni Chowk main street does not host a single restaurant that serves non-vegetarian food. The main and connecting streets (closer to Lal Quila) are interspersed with Jain mandirs, thus drawing non-garlic and non-onion eaters. However, near areas such

as Jama Masjid and the Church Mission Road lie the concentration of meat shops and restaurants.



Map 3: Places of worship in Chandni Chowk

(Chandni Chowk, New Delhi [Map], 2020)



Map 4: Vegetarian and Non-vegetarian Food Vendors in Chandni Chowk

(Chandni Chowk, New Delhi [Map], 2020)

The food sold in markets around Chandni Chowk (such as in Kinari Bazaar and Meena Bazaar) was restricted to push-carts that were situated at street junctions, or around shop corners. Most vendors remained in fixed locations for the entirety of a week (if not longer), stating that their push-carts did not serve the purpose of convenient transport, but

instead adapted to the availability of space in extremely crowded streets. Varieties of *Chaat*, *kachoris*, baked biscuits such as *nankhatai*, and other snack foods are sold to customers on the go.

The layout of Chandni Chowk evolved with the changes in history, following riots and migratory movements in 1857 and 1947. Post Partition, however, there was an attempt to rebuild the Walled City of Shahjahanabad. Conservation projects that were initiated then have spilled over into the twenty-first century, with the latest one underway.

In 1911 Delhi ousted Calcutta as the new capital of India. When this was adjudged, Edwin Lutyens was to redesign its layout. “New Delhi was designed with hexagonal and triangular patterns, the triangle reflecting three major functions, viz., commercial, governmental and recreational” (Jain, 2016, p. 8). Shahjahanabad lay adjacent to but separate from the new city. The contrast created an aged, non-sanitized, slum-like reputation for Shahjahanabad. Migration during and after 1947 halted any progress that could be made in improving the conditions of its environment.

Once refugees had rehabilitated, the first attempt at a revamp was made in 1962, with the implementation of a Delhi Master Plan. ‘Perpetuating the colonial concepts, the Delhi Master Plan (1962–1981) found the Walled City area a “slum” and “congested, filthy, obsolete, functionally lacking in exclusive land use zones and in all the respects, a community that is socially and culturally stagnant” (Jain, 2016, p. 12). The devaluation of the old city was supplemented with the delegation of various issues to their concerned departments; the municipal corporation took up the maintenance of public spaces, roads, and garbage disposal. Little headway was made with the project, as Chandni Chowk still stands to be a congested, overcrowded area. Residential areas continued to dwindle in the twentieth century as more land went toward commercial uses.

The Master Plan in 2001 proposed more guidelines for conservation, and divided Shahjahanabad into four ‘Urban Renewal Areas’. Its clauses included “Conservation and restoration of historical buildings” and “Revitalisation of residential areas” (Jain, 2004, p. 31).

While the changes are not significant, another project has taken over the accessibility of Chandni Chowk presently. The current conservation project that had been initiated by the

Aam Aadmi Party government in Delhi is still ongoing. Scheduled to end in January 2020, it has surpassed its deadline and left Chandni Chowk dug up irregularly, blocking access for vehicles such as cars and rickshaws. The lanes are more choked, and much of the main street looks unnavigable.

These conservation projects are both inconvenient for the food industry (amongst other businesses) in Chandni Chowk, and inefficient. With the third major project being implemented since independence, among smaller plans, Chandni Chowk has remained much the same. While New Delhi has become the primary focus, Chandni Chowk's romanticized history and current reputation do not go unnoticed. Rarely have its violent encounters been documented, and there are very few photographic records of its suffering during the Partition. Historian and Professor Nayanjot Lahiri chalks down the static environment of Chandni Chowk to the negligence of the Government. "I think it's the way it is partly because of benign neglect, intentional neglect. And now, of course, it helps to have it the way it is because this is what makes it such an attraction... the vintage character [that] gives it its sell-ability" (N. Lahiri, personal communication, February 12, 2020). As far as tourism is concerned, the aesthetic of Chandni Chowk has remained much the same through the decades, with little to no attention paid to hygiene and pipelines by authorities, or parking spots, accessibility, and expansion. Shops in places like Paranthewali Gali have stood where they were since their initiation, and their banners proudly state the year of their establishment perhaps as a nod to their longevity and historicity. Shop-owners have also suffered at the hands of over-emphasis on tourism and lack of any substantial change; their customer rates have fallen with the construction, and obstruction of parking space. *Daulat ki Chaat* vendors brought up the fact that their dish was sold at Chandni Chowk only during the monsoon, and now the lack of accessibility has affected their businesses; dust from adjacent construction sites interferes with performance and quality.

While the structure of Chandni Chowk has both moulded to and stood independent of historic and political changes, the current administrative programmes are halting its business and tourism more than ever. The lack of efficiency of a single plan has led to periods of negligence and over-involvement, thus breaking the dynamism of the Walled City.

MIGRATION AND FOOD COMMUNITIES



Chapter 7: Migration and Food Communities

I. Patterns and the Partition - Setting Context

The history of Chandni Chowk has not received the documentation it needs, and thus records of riots, political uprisings, and as a result migration, are scarcely available as secondary sources. However, the event of the Partition in 1947 was such a cataclysm that it created a geographic and political rift. The effects of this were felt especially in the Eastern and the Northern regions of India and subsequently forced a mass cross-border migration. Delhi's proximity to Punjab and the newly created Pakistan placed it within a belt of civilian movement; there was an influx and simultaneous outflux of migrants between Eastern and Western Punjab. Migration was influenced by poor border planning on the part of the British, and the delay in the declaration of the final map.



Map 5: Radcliffe Line

(Pillalamarri, A. (2017). 70 Years of the Radcliffe Line. *The Diplomat*.)

The Radcliffe Line was the proposed border between the two countries but it had been mapped out by a commission that had never visited India. Consequently, several cities and towns became disputed areas due to the uncertainty of their geographic location on either side of the border. Lahore, a city in Punjab became a nerve-centre for communal tension, not because of a Hindu and Sikh majority, but its contrasting role as a capital of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century. Its position was only revealed after independence and therefore the apprehension triggered a wave of unsettlement in the city. Pockets of religious

communities began to move out or were forcefully dislocated. “Ten million Punjabis were uprooted. In all-around 13 million people were displaced by partition. This was the largest migration in a century whose wars and ethnic conflicts rendered millions of people homeless” (Talbot, 2007, p.152).

The Partition pulled Punjabi civilians toward Delhi and East Punjab, while pushing out Muslim migrants. Historian, writer, and filmmaker Sohail Hashmi estimates that while Delhi’s population was at 9 lakh civilians in 1947, it had fallen by an overwhelming 3 lakhs, characterized by a population of Muslims who had been displaced or killed. And with the influx of migrants, the population crossed double the original number by 1951. “Meanwhile, the population of Muslims in the city declined from 33.22% in 1941 to 5.33% in 1951.” (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 13, 2020).

This was one of the largest movements of migration for Delhi, and it was unsurprising that it changed the flavour of art, language, folkways, cinema, and food. A year-long event retold the Walled City’s cuisine that had been developing for the outstanding duration of the Mughal Empire’s reign.

Delhi was struck by a revolt in its food culture, owing to the introduction of Punjabi ingredients, recipes, and palettes that replaced or integrated themselves into a largely Mughlai menu. The migration of the *Tandoor* found itself locked into a new cuisine in favour of fading Mughlai techniques and dishes. However, it was initially brought to Delhi as a memory of Punjab, and not as a food service. Refugees would carry *tandoors* with them for convenience; “*Dal-roti* was the staple; *bhartha* a treat, all of which could be cooked in the *tandoor*. The rest of the country was introduced to the magic of the *tandoor* without suffering the trauma of bloodshed and arson” (Pant, 2013, p. 21).

When meat was added, non-vegetarian dishes with spice variants were created. Scarcely are Shahjahanabad’s Mughlai culinary legacies accessible now. Persian Scholar Salma Hussain reported to writer Anoothi Vishal, that of these surviving dishes, the historic *gola kebab* which articulated a skill of taking the meat off the skewer as a whole piece had been reduced to “one Kebabchi outside Jama Masjid [who did *gola kebabs*] till about two decades ago. When he stopped, I asked him why and he replied, ‘*bibi, ab woh purane log hi nahin rahe*. (The old connoisseurs are all gone)” (Vishal, 2017).

In Chandni Chowk, Jama Masjid hosts the few remaining restaurants and shops for *kebabs*, and other prominent Mughlai dishes. Their menus are however variants of tomato-based gravies with small differences in preparation. There is one *halwai*- Shyam Sweets that prides itself in Nagori Halwa, which is made from semolina flour and has been a recipe according to the owner, preserved for over 200 years.



Image 2: Kebabs being cooked in Karim's

With migration came the role of memory and identity which held a strong narrative here because it was the home-cooked food that they wanted to bring with them. The sudden ousting from their own territory left many refugees scrambling for the few portable things they could take with them. The *Tandoor*, or the *Sanjha Chulha* became the common utensil in Old Delhi because of the rise in the Punjabi population after the Partition. This subsequent demographic change made the demand for homely flavours more popular. Catering to the new tastebuds meant adapting to the use of the *tandoor*, which facilitated the palette of the Punjabi community.

Apart from the commercial use of the *tandoor*, the basic gastronomy of food changed, i.e. the gravy that dictated the elements of flavour. The base of a dish- the gravy, was modified and it shook the foundations of the very anatomy of food. Punjabi culture introduced a new combination, comprising of onions and tomatoes. Yoghurt and spice-based flavours subsided in favour of a more umami- 'naturally rich in glutamates' (Vishal, 2017) taste. Chicken *tikka*, *paneer butter masala*, *paneer makhani*, and other dishes that overlap in

their fundamental tastes (with variations in protein) share a similar base which involves the use of tomatoes and onions as the primary ingredients.

Sohail Hashmi notes a change in dishes that contain *dal*, and vegetables. He states that ‘*black whole urad*’ (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 13, 2020) was a product of Punjabi migration, in contrast to the *dal* that was more popular before that- which was white *urad*. The *tadka* added to *dal* was also a variation of Punjabi cuisine. “Now in the traditional Delhi method, each *dal* had a separate *tadka*. For example, the yellow flat *dal* (*arhar*) is given the *tadka* only of garlic. The moong *dal* is given the *tadka* of clove/long. *Chane ki dal* is given the *tadka* of onion. Each *dal* has a separate *tadka* because in some of these *dals* you want to enhance a flavour, in others you want to suppress an unpleasant odour that comes from the *dal*” (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 13, 2020). Punjabi cooking, on the other hand, called for a single kind of *tadka* which was made of chopped tomatoes, onions, coriander, and green chillies. As the variety in *tadka* dwindled down to a single recipe, the expanse of vegetables used also became limited. Sohail Hashmi states the disappearance of traditionally Indian vegetables (especially summer vegetables ranging from gourds to cucumber) was promoted by the prevalence of paneer, potatoes, and mushrooms. He also communicates the sudden year-round availability of vegetables that were once categorized as seasonal. Cauliflowers, carrots, turnips, and radishes have become staples and have replaced summer vegetables as the principal foods of consumption.

Migration influenced the food culture to an extent that it created a new community with specific tastes and ingredients, that were tailored to their familiarities. However, the culinary changes are not unique to Chandni Chowk; food is a universal mechanism for creating and storing memories, and thus an integral part of moulding a cultural identity. Rana Safvi aptly frames the role of food in bringing people together: “food always joins; it never divides.” (R. Safvi, personal communication, February 11, 2020)

II. The Formation of the Modern Food Community in Chandni Chowk - What We Discovered

The migration of Punjabi refugees shifted the course of food in Delhi, but stories of individual and intercity migration have shaped the current food community in Chandni Chowk. Landmarks like Paranthewali Gali have rendered accounts of migrants who set up

shop in the 20th century and rooted legacies that have been passed down through their families. The creation of the current food community in Chandni Chowk has been compartmentalised into shop-owners and consumers, catalysed by the memory of food, family, and recipes. The rapport between them is what brings customers back time and again; while minute differences in food can be forgotten, the hospitality of vendors cannot.

Customers can rely on their favourite dishes either being recreated or largely maintained through the decades. Encompassing the idea of ‘comfort food’, customers are drawn to the same shops or restaurants repetitively because they find that the flavours are either comforting or reminiscent of some familial memory.

Based on interviews conducted, a community sentiment has been derived from an environment of dependency and homeliness, both provided for by the food vendor. The following cycle presents itself through the data collected by our group members from conversations with producers and consumers concentrated in Chandni Chowk, supplemented by inputs from academicians such as historian and author Rana Safvi, and history professor and author Nayanjot Lahiri.

A cyclical pattern can be mapped out, which originates at the moment of migration, followed by the demand for reminiscent food which prompts the establishment of shops. Likewise, the need for economic stability also encourages food businesses. However, the nature of food has been long influenced by the kind of audience and the recipes that have run in the families of vendors. Recipes and foodways become entrenched in these establishments, and over time become mechanisms of tradition. They assimilate with the happenings of the area and eventually contribute to the overall identity of Chandni Chowk.

With a boom in the number of non-franchised shops and restaurants that have stayed significant over decades, there was also the need for a self-reflective aspect adopted by migrant vendors wherein they began to search for unique identifications of their own dishes (such as the use of pure *desi ghee*, or home sourced ingredients and spices) as a mode for handling competition especially against franchises such as Haldiram’s. These particularities became attractions for customers who eventually became regulars.

Now, based on the interviews with producers, consumers, and academicians, a blueprint of a community was drafted, that connected conversations amongst these people.

The web was drawn on the basis of responses to food by consumers, and the atmosphere that vendors wished to perpetuate for a particular kind of dish or its regular customer. With quotes from producers and customers especially, each statement carried a weight of sentiment and attachment, to the store and to the food they made and consumed. When producers were asked of the kind of customers they catered to the most, they made it clear that they did not discriminate based on religious or class differences.

“If the rich man is feeling awkward, he has to bear with it, both are customers. There hasn’t been any instance of that, we don’t discriminate, and the rich have to make do if they are feeling uncomfortable. In the morning, for the last hundred years, we have been providing the poor with *rotis*. You will see a long cue at 6:30 to 7:00 in the morning, a long line of beggars, and we provide them with *rotis*. We have been doing this for the past 100 years. Everyone gets roti. It is my duty to give them *roti*.” (R. Gidwani, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Emotional connections were uncovered, between visitors and their families, and shopkeepers and their ancestors. The above sentiments can only be articulated through the retelling of their moving stories and statements that carried with them history, love, and inspiration. Each shop we went to, was understood through the lens of the producer/owner’s history, and the relationship between the consumer and its food. We explored the effects of migration in establishing a food community by analysing the experiences of multiple shopkeepers that have built a name for themselves.

To start with, academicians set the foundation of the role of migration, independent of mass movements that were initiated by political events such as the Partition. Tracing history as far back as 1857, and the era of the fall of the Mughal Empire, the disintegration of such a prominent political and economic force put millions out of jobs. Cooks were disbanded from royal kitchens, and as Rana Safvi recalls,

“They came out and started selling on the steps of Jama Masjid, in front of Matia Mahal, in and around Chandni Chowk. That is why you have these traditional shops, like you have Karims. Then you have that [Old] Famous Jalebiwala and the Paranthe Wali Gali and of course, all these have started after 1857 and their descendants are still carrying on their traditions. The recipes which were till then restricted onto the

imperial table came on to the streets and became available to the common man.” (R. Savfi, personal communication, February 11, 2020)

In the later decades, migration prompted the conception of shops because it would provide the basic source of income for them, at one of the lowest investment levels. Punjabi migrants already had with them their *tandoors*, so their businesses became oriented toward their culture’s cuisine. Other migrants who came to Chandni Chowk later brought with them dishes that had been passed down through generations, such as the famous *Daulat ki Chaat*. Although its origins are vague, it was considered the food of the *maharajas*. It holds different names in different cities as Sohail Hashmi points out, “in Varanasi it is *makhmal*, else in Kanpur it is *malaiya* (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 13, 2020).” Similarly, Rana Safvi recalls that *chhole-kulche* was brought in by Pakistan refugees.

Lotan Chole-Kulche Wala is located in a narrow lane that has more shops catering to electrical equipment and stationery than showing any semblance of hosting one of the most popular joints for post-partition food. As told by Mr. Mahavir, whose great-grandfather was the renowned Lotan Ji, the origin of their business begins at the moment of migration to Delhi; Lotan Ji’s father was from Chandausi Village in UP, and the dish travelled down from there via his son. With the lack of job opportunities available it seemed fitting to start a business of selling a dish that they were unsurprisingly familiar with. They have been selling *chhole-kulche* for more than a hundred years now. What makes them distinct from other stalls and restaurants is their belief in serving *chhole* with *kulchas* instead of *bhature*, because:

“The way *chhole* is made for *bhatura* is different from how it is made for *kulcha*. There is a difference in *masalas*. The *chhole* served with *kulcha* has crushed *garam masala* in it, while the other *chhole* is first boiled and then *tadka* is applied. We don’t apply *tadka* to our *chhole* while cooking. Our *tadka* is kept for later.” (Mahavir, personal communication, February 10, 2020)

They also source their *masalas* from home; which has proven to be a major influence to the unique taste of their dishes. They have subsequently gained a loyal following of customers who trust the almost constant taste of the dishes over time. Lotan Chole-Kulche Waala’s legacy was of a one-man’s journey of migration that has ultimately become a must-visit in Old Delhi.



Image 3: Masala Chhole and Kulche from Lotan

Similar stories have been observed with producers at Chandni Chowk, such as the four major shops at Paranthewali Gali. Sakun Sharma, the current owner of Pandit Baburam Paranthe Wala recalled that her husband's great grandfather moved from his village to Delhi, and made his culinary art a business when people began to develop a liking for deep-fried *paranths*. When his shop was established, others also popped up in that *gali*, by brothers of the same family. Their speciality became deep-fried *paranths*, which is in stark contrast to the Punjabi method of cooking on a *tawa*. Sakun Sharma says that the technique was brought to Chandni Chowk because of its use at home; thus, her family's movement to Delhi and the migration of a staple food created Paranthewali Gali, where celebrities come to shoot and eat. Her attachment to her shop is so deep-seated that she does not want to give this business up. To sum up her sentiment "I think of the shop as my mother" (S. Sharma, personal communication, February 10, 2020) she says.

Chaina Ram and Shyam Sweets are also the products of migration. Ram Gidwani, the owner of Chaina Ram says:

The name Chaina Ram was established in the year 1901, in Lahore in Pakistan where my great-grandfather started the business and then my grandfather and my father

carried the business on. The name Chaina Ram was quite popular there also and we used the same name here also after the partition and when we moved to Delhi and started the business and same items’ (personal communication, February 10, 2020).



Image 4: Chaina Ram's Sweets

Karachi halwa, being their speciality is complemented by dishes from Rajasthan. Ram Gidwani himself is from Delhi but his grandparents hailed from Lahore. The political tension created by the Partition does not allow him to go back and visit; he says safety has become an issue. He, however, caters to visitors from Lahore and the rest of Pakistan; and states that Pakistani customers depend on his shop for purchasing sweets during festivals. The cooks he would work with also moved during the Partition, “If we didn’t have the first wave of cooks who came during partition, then this would not have had success. We provide them with accommodation and food, and they are pretty content with that” (R. Gadwani, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

The owner of Shyam Sweets’s family is also a migrant group from Allahabad, although the reasons for the movement are only known to his ancestors. His shop sells dishes that are around 200 years old and reminiscent of the foodways of the Mughal Empire. In roughly 120 years since its construction, Shyam Sweets has maintained a crowd and expanded its variety. They cater to breakfasters and businesspersons who stop by for a quick meal and have been coming for years (and counting).

Besides relationships between consumers and producers, there seemed to be friendships and bonds amongst producers themselves. Almost as if sharing a similar history, their stories were threads that knitted them together and built a community where competition was overtly non-existent, because each knew that they brought something unique to Old Delhi,

“Shop owners, during the day time, just leave their stalls to come and have *paneer pakoda* here. All of the *halwais* there come here to eat this.” (Bobby, personal communication, 10 February, 2020).

“We sometimes snack at our own shop, and sometimes go to other places. We go to Lotan Chhole-Kulche, Chaina Ram’s confectioners, etc” (S. Agarwal, personal communication, February 9, 2020).

Stories from producers have proven that the migratory patterns, both cross-border and intercity, have played a role in building a food community in Chandni Chowk. While this chapter closely correlates to that of memory, it is the movement of these businesspersons who have built legacies over hundreds of years, and in turn, solidified their memories in the food they cook. The impact of their migration is evident in their longstanding shops and their emotional attachment to them.

AUTHENTICITY



Chapter 8: Authenticity

“Every five years, ten years, fifteen years, the flavour changes, the colour changes, the taste changes. But the changes are so subtle that you don’t even notice it. So, nothing remains constant. It is in this frame that you have to look at food... it is within this that changes are taking place gradually. And some of them transformed the food totally.” - Sohail Hashmi

“Nothing has changed with the recipes. I didn’t change the way we even grind the masala. It’s beaten in the same way that it used to be, always. The only difference is back then one person did it, now five people do it... So, everything is very authentic” - Owner of Kake Di Hatti

“Of course it has been romanticized. Again, from the point of tourism. They say that ‘We are the older ones,’ so they get a kick out of it... it has been romanticized.” - Vikramjit Singh Rooprai

“They’ve been working for generations and we’ve been ordering from them for generations. Our great-grandfathers used to buy from them, and now their great-grandsons sell to us” - Mahavir, Owner of Lotan Chole Kulche Wala

“You see, I would say more than 90% of all food, that there is nothing called authenticity. As I have been trying to tell you, food is constantly reinvented so there is nothing called authenticity and if there was a standard recipe for making something then you won’t need chefs for it!” - Sohail Hashmi

“Food preparation in Chandni Chowk is the original preparation. People have tried to copy, but the main restaurants of Chandni Chowk have always been consistent - Ram Gidwani, Owner of Chaina Ram

“The reason our shop is so popular for so many years is because we also follow the lifestyles of our forefathers.” - Kalyan, Manager of Hazari Lal Jain Khurchan Wale

“If anything had changed in Chandni Chowk, you wouldn’t come here to research. There is no change” - Consumer at Kuremal Kulfi

Chandni Chowk is not only a polyphony of myriad cultures and tastes, but also time. For when it comes to Chandni Chowk, time is currency. Places mired in history have invariably had a long-standing dalliance with time. Time, which must, in addition to historical and spatial changes, be also read in terms of how it is marketed, commodified, paper wrapped, exoticized and sold to numerous consumers.

A lot of the literature that we read blindly exoticized the rich history of Chandni Chowk's foodways. Consumption documented on the diverse range of blogs and vlogs that caught our attention, was not the consumption of a culinary experience or enterprise, but of an institution; of a fascinating and exquisite slice of history.

From the snippets of the conversations copied above, there broadly emerged two schools of thought as far as the question of authenticity went. First, generally, was the narrative of the producers, who more or less stated how their culinary practices had not changed since their shop's inception, and how people flocked to their joints for one reason and one reason alone: Authenticity. Each shopkeeper we met claimed that their shops had carried on the legacy of their forefathers, and that they prided themselves on carrying on those very traditions. Many of these shops' patrons also cited originality, consistency, and authenticity as the reasons for visiting them ever so frequently. When we asked a customer why he loved eating *kulfi* at Kuremal Mohanlal Kulfiwale, he said:

What you find in Delhi, you can't find all over India. It's a mix of all the cultures available in India. The way they serve, the way they treat you – that's the best you could find. Chandni Chowk is not a place! Chandni Chowk is not a destination. Chandni Chowk is an emotion! You come here and you find emotions! (personal communication, February 9, 2020)

Many members of the food community in Chandni Chowk looked at authenticity as an inherent part of the food that they were consuming. They believed that food and the history of its recipe, and methods of preparation were inextricably linked with one another. They perceived authenticity as the key to the uniqueness and legacy of the dish.

On the contrary, a lot of the literature that we read and the academics we spoke to reduced authenticity to a trope and argued that it was employed by a host of vendors in Chandni Chowk as a means of adding cultural capital. The minute the food of Chandni

Chowk was marketed and structured as a larger cultural symbol, passed down through the annals of history, it became exotic, transcending all class codes. It became marketable to a range of elite classes for its position in history.

Academics also argued that due to the vast political turbulence and migration that Old Delhi had borne witness to, the demography of Chandni Chowk was radically altered. This led to numerous changes and a mishmash of recipes, ingredients, and flavors. Food, ontologically itself, is so dynamic that the quest to locate its authenticity was a futile one.

Our role as oral historians is to advantage the accounts of both schools of thought, which do invariably vary given vastly differing situatedness. Our own positionality in the process is not lost on us. That we were not native inhabitants or regular dwellers of the space would have presumably had some impact on how information was disseminated to us and how we processed it.

The aforementioned montage of narratives presents an interesting medley of claims spoken with equal dollops of certitude. Given the frequency with which authenticity was implied in our interactions, we as a group located our interest in the question of authenticity not in terms of its absence or presence in the food we consumed, but in the modes in which it was theorized and constructed by the parties involved. For the purpose of this chapter, we are examining authenticity from three key standpoints: commodification, Legacy and Preservation, and Performativity.

I. Authenticity as Commodification

The narratives of history need not necessarily be taken at face value. Literature and academics contest that the vendors of Chandni Chowk have used history to their disposal. The history of food in Chandni Chowk is also the history of commodification of culture, where cultural status and heritage are neatly wrapped up, commodified and peddled with a pinch of history. For example, Even if many of the shop owners claim authenticity, they have still adapted to changes in the market. Ved Prakash Lemon Wale has added *tikkis* to their menu in the last two decades and Kake Di Hatti has introduced a variety of *naans*.

Author and scholar Rana Safvi stated that in 1857, when the Mughal Empire finally collapsed, many of the royal cooks of Chandni Chowk were forced to step out of the *Havelis* and cook on streets to earn a living. The majority of their customers included traders, merchants, and other locals. Food was never really popularized in the larger context of Delhi. It was only later that the food was historicized through myths and stories and became a larger symbol of Delhi (R. Safvi, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

Not only do scholars argue that Chandni Chowk has used historicity to boost sales and break class codes, the authenticity associated with the food in Old Delhi is often co-opted by other urban and elite establishments. The “authentic taste of Old Delhi” with the undertones of cultural capital is distributed at exorbitant prices in the plush air-conditioned malls of Gurgaon and Noida (Gandhi, 2015).

II. Authenticity and Legacy

I’m telling you what my father said to me, what my grandfather told him... what he used to tell the customers in front of me, and they used to agree. My father used to talk about how the shop is a hundred years old. I used to find it very strange. But when I started sitting at the shop, when 80-year-old senior citizens started coming and telling me that they’ve been drinking this lemon water since their childhood, and that their grandfathers used to buy them the drink, that their fathers have also had it there, my eyes opened and so did the curtain behind my ears as I realised that it was true. I’ve heard it myself from elders aged seventy and eighty who come to the shop. (Chini Bhai, personal communication, February 10, 2020)

Although we attribute this quote to its speaker, we soon realized that it was impossible to individualize it, as it was virtually the narrative of every shopkeeper back in Chandni Chowk. History was an inevitable load, translated into legacy, converging into authenticity.

Something unique about the foodways of Chandni Chowk was that the recipes were only orally passed down. There was no system of keeping or tracking recipes in cookbooks. Additionally, most foods, sans *chaat*, were only developed and produced within families (*Daulat ki Chaat*, *paranths* in Paranthewali Gali, Kuremal Kulfi). This custom, legacy is

underscored as “originality” and “exclusivity”; words which shopkeepers often used during interviews to describe their products.

This practice instantly attached legacy to authenticity. The fact that cooking cannot be standardized, that it could not be learned in any way apart from practice, and therefore cannot be learned without observation, engagement and practice along the process became the reason why it was usually passed down only within families. The interviews also revealed that the shopkeepers often did not even remember *when* they learned the recipe, but remembered *with* and *from whom*. Most of them considered it to be a part of their growing up.



Image 5: Portrait of Founder, Hazari Lal Jain Khurchan Wale

The theme of legacy alongside authenticity also spoke a great deal about the idea of preservation. The food community of Chandni Chowk was obviously not following all the same methods, ingredients and recipes. However, by being a part of an unbroken legacy which has continued the same practice, the community has partaken in some form of historiography, in envisioning and safeguarding some relic of history.

III. Authenticity and Performativity

The shopkeepers of many iconic shops in Chandni Chowk cited their authenticity and resistance to change as the reasons for their success. Most of them told us, in a matter of fact manner, that neither had their recipes changed nor had the methods, save a few minor tweaks here and there.

On asking Bobby Bhai, one of the owners of Ved Prakash Lemon Wale, whether there had been any changes to his shop or beverage in the past hundred years, he said:

No change at all. Only repairing and painting has been done to maintain the shop. Even the recipe is exactly the same as before. With the blessings of my elders, a customer cannot pass by our shop without wanting to drink the lemon water. Some people are coming here for over fifty years and some of them are my grandfather's school friends, and we feel very good about it. Some people say that their father used to get them here and now they are getting their children. (Chini Bhai, personal communication, February 10, 2020)

The owner of Kake Di Hatti also said:

Kake Di Hatti is a 1942 brand. I say 1942 because we don't have records before that. When I applied for the trademark, they asked me for the proofs, so I gave them the documents as proof that this existed in 1942. I got the trademark, registered in India, then Europe, 17 countries in Europe, even London... before that, I don't have records, but it does go beyond that. The same thing is carrying on till now: same *chhola*, same *naan*, the only difference is what I got in my inheritance. Two dishes: *kulche*, *chhole*; that's it. This was what they were serving since the beginning. (personal communication, February 10, 2020)

In fact, he insisted that the method had not changed to the degree that even the mechanics of grinding stood the same.

I didn't even change the way we grind the masala, using *Hamam Dasta*. It's beaten like this. They still do the same thing. The difference is back then one person did it, now five people do it. You know the surprising thing is, for me personally, when you use *Hamam Dasta*, a layer of iron disappears over a period of seven months. So, imagine where it goes. Can you tell me where the iron goes? It doesn't go into the ground. It goes into the masala. This much iron gets over in 6 months, and a hole appears. (personal communication, February 10, 2020)



Image 6: Kake Di Hatti

In such narratives and many more that we encountered, authenticity was a source of tremendous pride, almost as if the burden of history, culture, legacy and tradition converged into this notion of authenticity. Every shop owner, save none, spoke about their shop's historicity, and how nothing had changed. It was strange and serendipitous how both shopkeepers and consumers alike, had incredible faith in the authenticity of the food and its unique space in the history of Old Delhi and Chandni Chowk.

Contrary to these narratives, the scholarship of food studies has situated itself within the ambit of structuralism to theorize on and examine food. That is, food has often been dealt with by deconstructing and unpacking its relationship with larger overarching structures, especially originality (Narayanan, 2016).

The academics that we spoke to often adopted a structural framework to challenge the label of authenticity ascribed by the vendors of Chandni Chowk. The inevitability of change was cited by each scholar as an attack on that very label of authenticity. Sohail Hashmi discredited the very idea of a single recipe. Arguing that food like any other creative field necessitated innovation, he believed that it was impossible for cooks of Chandni Chowk to stick to any one rigid recipe without adding variations. He stated:

You have a standard - this much of this thing, this much of that, this is how you roast it for two minutes, this is the standard recipe. Then why do you need chefs and cooks? Food like all creative things is innovative. Everybody who loves to cook... take any

dish that you like and see how many variants of that you can see. (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 13, 2020)

Hashmi also problematized the search for authenticity in creative pursuits such as music, dance, and food as faulty, for their eternal proclivity to change was what made them so potent and exciting. Rana Safvi and Vikramjit Singh Rooprai also believed that the food had been romanticized for tourists and that spatial, social and cultural changes had obviously impacted the way that food was made, and hence its authenticity.

Cambridge research fellow Lizzie Collingham, in her seminal work *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (2006) argues that the effort to locate Indian cuisine is an elusive one. She writes:

On both sides of the Atlantic, these high-class restaurants place great value on the authenticity of their food. The chefs are often specially trained in India and cook only dishes from their home region. Even the more traditional restaurants are beginning to follow this trend and advertise their dishes as “authentic.” Supermarkets, too, offer an “authentic” Indian experience with every ready-prepared Indian meal. But what does authenticity really mean? And is authenticity really the right yardstick by which to judge an Indian meal? (p. 2)

Due to the variety of spatial, social, cultural and political variables, it is difficult to singularize a criterion to determine authenticity. However, there is something interesting to glean from Collingham’s position. Her contention muddies the search for authenticity in the Indian context as the construction of food alters on lines of class, caste, race, religion, and region.

However, in Collingham’s material claim there also lies an inherent universal desire to singularize the definition of authenticity. As the scholars decry the claim of authenticity as a marketing gimmick, there lies a presupposition of authenticity being defined in terms of replicability of the original, that only the food that is closest to its original can be deemed to be authentic. And while this critique of authenticity is not faulty, the critique presumes “similarity to original” to be the sole yardstick and structure on which authenticity predicates itself.

Although, by that logic, Coca Cola, KFC and McDonald's combined, form and regularly churn out the most authentic foods as the taste remains constant and the standard of procedure remains the same. In contrast, there is no standard recipe for the majority of the food in Chandni Chowk; the recipes of which, as previously mentioned, are transmitted only orally. It is nearly improbable to make every *jalebi* or *parantha* or *kachori* to taste the same.

However, we contest that there may not be a singular definition, one unit to gauge authenticity and that the notion of authenticity must subsume a plurality to its definition. We further contest that authenticity is performative, that is, investigation of authenticity must divest its effort of seeking "what it is" and channelise it into decoding "what authenticity does". While originality is the most common yardstick, we argue that history, temporal legacy, and spatial endurance also form key criteria to determine authenticity. Our onus as researchers is also to challenge the formation and determination of authenticity on the basis of originality. If we choose to privilege the unique position of Chandni Chowk's food in the history of Delhi, and its endurance through the registers of history as alternate bases to determine its authenticity, the question of singularizing the definition of authenticity gets turned over its head and becomes almost immaterial.

We argue that authenticity is performative; instead of fixating on the closeness of the copy to the original, people must be granted the right to redefine their notion of authenticity. This liberates authenticity from the shackles of abiding by a structuralist, singular standard and opens up a whole range of possibilities. With several analyses of the interviews of both the producers and consumers, we derived two broad themes:

1. The authenticity that the producers often highlight ties into the legacy aspect of their process; of how recipes are orally passed, of the history they carry and denote. The endurance of the shops (how most have withstood prolonged tests of time) themselves further authenticates their products. The mechanized processes of large food corporations may ensure impeccable similarity and consistency in every food item, but with technological mass reproduction also comes the risk of detachment of the commodity; detachment of the commodity from its producer and consumer. If similarity to the original is the only test to authenticity, there are no reasons as to why burgers and pizzas from fast food restaurants with glaring similarities to their "original" are rarely branded as "authentic". The constant effort undertaken in Chandni Chowk to privilege a certain legacy, to carry on the tradition and to

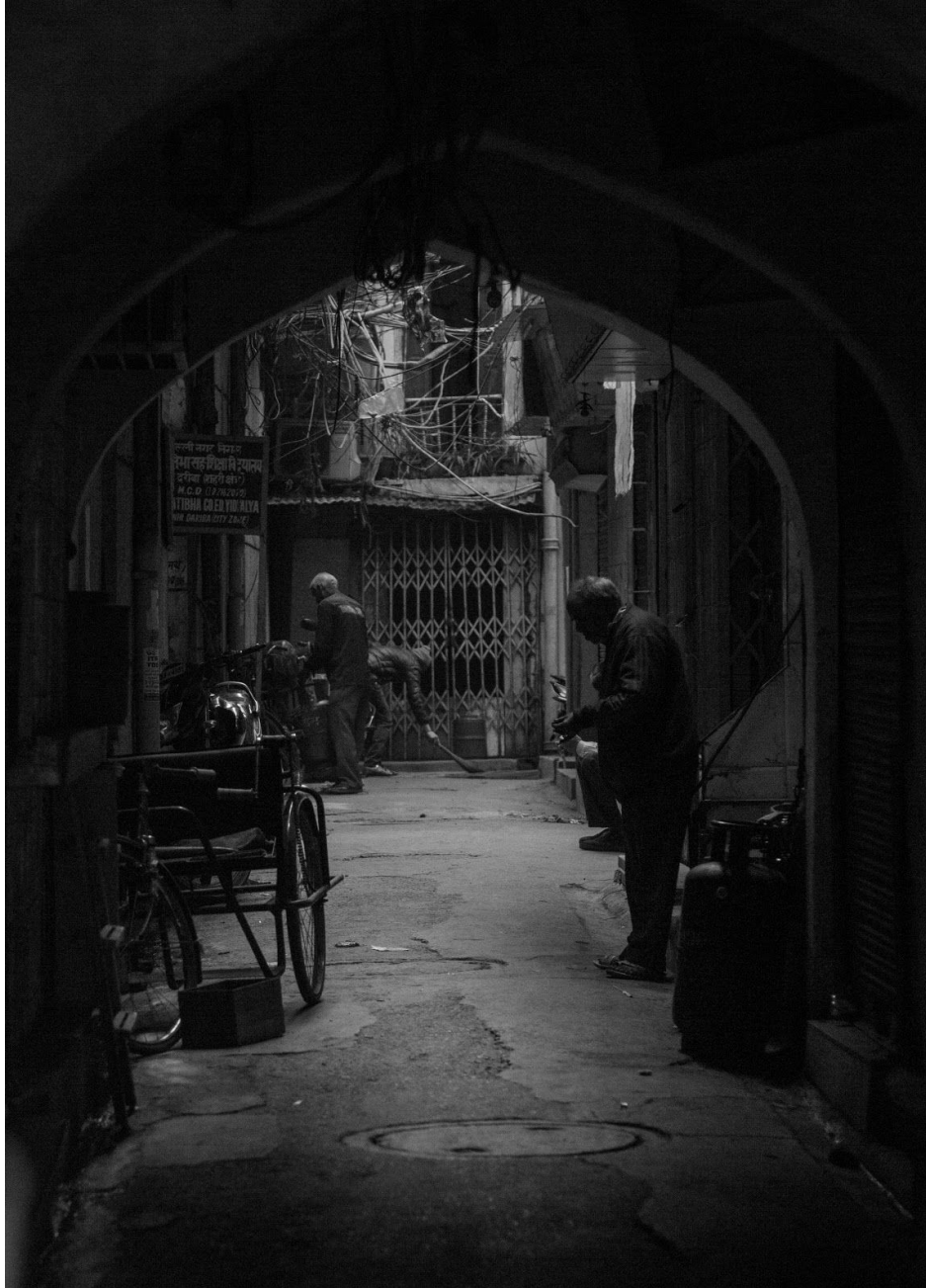
cling to a very particular part, uniquely and unknowingly, adds to a spirit of community, to a deeper and more elemental sense of history which arguably adds to the food's authenticity.

2. The academics claim that it is impossible to follow recipes to a T, for food that does not change simply dies. This may well be true, and many of the shopkeepers' claim to unchanged recipes since time immemorial must not go unchallenged. However, we would also like to contest that and introduce the question of memory, particularly from the standpoint of consumption. It is perhaps inevitable for all of the food to have changed, courtesy market demands. But interviews also highlight a curious kinship between the consumers and the food of Chandni Chowk. We argue that the relationship forged between the community and other consumers of Chandni Chowk with not only its food but also space, time and history is so strong that it transcends the notions of quality, so much so that not only the ability but also the desire to discern similarities between originality is suspended. And yet most consumers swear by the food's authenticity. Thus, spatial, temporal, affective and memorial factors construct this idea of authenticity. The memories of all the members of the Chandni Chowk food community construct a unique kind of authenticity, where lenses of originality are rendered largely immaterial.

Some claims of an "unchanged recipe" and "same cooking methods" may mostly be specious and qualify as marketing gimmicks. However, there is a bigger picture to our initial questions of authenticity.

Perhaps it is because the kind Ram Gidwani of Chaina Ram generously filled our stomachs and fed our hearts with bowls and bowls of *gajar ka halwa* and *gujiya* doused in some decadent *ghee*, and because he unabashedly sat with us and told us stories of his childhood, cricketing days and *mithai ki dukaan*, that something stuck, and something struck. And this is how authenticity met memory.

MEMORY



Chapter 9: Memory

In the cacophony of cars, scooters, pedestrians, rickshaws - both electric and pulled; in the stalls, stores, shops of sarees, syrups, scents; in the bustle between Fatehpuri Masjid and Red Fort, and the hustle to get from one to another; in those who came and saw, amongst those who left and some who remained; in those loud aromas of ghee, chutney and the symphony of those heckling for a few grams more; along the T that forms of a mithai wala and a jalebi wala, of all the arrivals, departures, hellos, and goodbyes; there in that moment, lay the bittersweet taste of February; Chandni Chowk.

There has been a certain tendency for sociological and anthropological studies to deny memory the space it deserves. The sociology of memory has often privileged collective memory over individual memory. However, rarely have sociological studies recognized the role of individual memory in materially affecting the world (Fox & Alldred, 2019). In this project, we would like to deconstruct the role of these memories, often shaped by migratory processes and how they impact foodways of Chandni Chowk. The previous chapter on migration elaborated on the unmistakable impact of migration on food; this chapter seeks to delve deeper into the individual accounts and recollection of memory and how those shape both food and identity of the community of Chandni Chowk.

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Delhi has always been a seat of migration, as most seats of power tend to be, with Chandni Chowk acting host and home to a diverse range of communities. In an interview, Rana Safvi argued that food has always been an extremely fluid entity and has perpetually been in flux, especially in a place like Chandni Chowk, due to the bouts of migration which it has experienced (personal communication, February 11, 2020). Furthermore, in 1857, after the fall of the Mughal Empire, the imperial kitchens were disbanded and many of the cooks came out to the streets to earn a living. The food that had remained exclusive to the imperial table suddenly became available to all. Thereafter, it became such a dominant part of the cultural identity of Chandni Chowk that soon, *Purani Dilli* became synonymous with food. Food remained in flux, and in 1947 the Partition caused food to be brought in from Punjab.

Flavours instantaneously changed yet again, with tomato, onion, and curd gaining traction unlike ever before (R. Safvi, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

Furthermore, migration created a community wherein a variety of festivals are celebrated by people coming from different geographical and religious backgrounds. There have always been foods associated with special seasons and occasions. As many of these festivals are a community affair, memories are instantly attached to that food, which gives people a sense of identity. Food associated with these festivals soon became a part of the culinary culture of Chandni Chowk, sold in the food stalls of the area, thereby making the shops an integral component of memory for both the residents and vendors of the community and their collective experience of these occasions.

In fact, these shops had become so much a matter of identity that numerous vendors never wanted to leave. Since the shops have been with their families for generations, they were convinced that the source of their success and wealth was these shops, and began associating certain superstitions with them. In the 1950s, there was a decision to allot the vendors with godowns and plots in the city. However, many refused for religious and sentimental reasons attributed to the legacy of their shops, the place where it had been established, and how they had been passed generation after generation.

For instance, Shivnarayan opened his own self-titled shop in 1870, and today, his identity is manifested through his shop. If he had reopened his shop elsewhere, claiming it to be Parathe Wali Gali's oldest shop, his credibility would radically diminish (S. Hashmi, personal communication, February 14, 2020). Therefore, it becomes evident that the memories associated with the establishment of the food business are intertwined with the memories associated with its location - the memories of Chandni Chowk.



Image 7: Parathe Wali Gali

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Both the owner of Kake di Hatti and Chaina Ram mentioned how memory was key in forging emotional attachments to a place, and how the relationship between food and community eventually transcended the notions of quality and taste.

The owner of Kake di Hatti told us how Chandni Chowk often witnesses people coming in and telling shop owners how their fathers used to visit these shops, and how today, they still come with their children. They eat what their fathers ate and often want to show their own kids what their grandfather ate (personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Ram Gidwani, the third -generation incumbent of Chaina Ram stated:

This is also because the people that moved from Pakistan to Delhi and started selling their food here have built their reputation by serving really good food since they arrived, and that still continues. And since the food is so good, the memory is instantly created in the customers' minds. So, I would say that Chandni Chowk is a hub. I would also say that a person who hasn't visited Chandni Chowk hasn't truly visited Delhi (R. Gidwani, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Thus, Chandni Chowk had invariably inherited myriad people, recipes, and delicacies from all across India. Furthermore, the partition brought in a generation with memories of a

home to which they could no longer return. Food stalls which produced similar cuisines induced nostalgia, attracting populations based on these emotions associated with their customs and cultures.

Therefore, the experiences and memories associated with the establishment itself play a greater role in people's perception of food rather than just the taste. Perhaps initial memories are created by quality, recipe, and taste, however, the reasons for a grandchild visiting their grandparents' favourite stalls transcend these factors, and are based on stories, shared memories, and the desire to create and experience similar memories of their own.

...

As a lot of the literature that we consumed and deliberated upon indicated that food was often used as a construct, to reimagine and hold on to one's roots; many of the producers stringently tried following the system of their forefathers, striving to constantly retain and reimagine the recipes that they had inherited. For many, memory which helped reconstruct food also helped them hold on to their identities. Food creates memories which are carried with migration, helping migrant communities hold on to their identities, and engraving these memories into heritage through legacy.

Umesh Sharma of Gyani Prasad Mohan said:

This *parantha* is not Punjabi. It is from the Brij side (Mathura region). We used to belong to that region. Everyone who came from there used to belong to the food business. My grandfather's mother was a cook in the houses of *seths*. The food is not prepared the same way as my ancestors used to prepare it, but it is almost similar. We don't keep the recipe written. It is verbally passed on through teaching the process of cooking. (personal communication, February 11, 2020)

Mahavir from Lotan Chole Kulche Wala said:

Yes, that's what I said. They've been coming since my great grandfather's time, and they're still coming, now that they're old and great grandfathers themselves. They say, "We've had *chhole* cooked by Lotan, then your father, and now we're eating *chhole* cooked by you!" (personal communication, February 10, 2020)

Yes, my elder son will take over the business. He has already started working. See, old customers come and tell me that my dish tastes the same as the way that my father used to make it. And now when new customers come they also like the taste the way my son makes it.

Thus, food became an integral system to perpetuate an inherited legacy. What was traditionally confined to the status of an occupation slowly but surely morphed into a matter of love, pride and identity enshrined into the heritage of Chandni Chowk.

...

As a group, we were also vested in the positionality of the consumers at Chandni Chowk, and how this influenced their consumption. We had a hunch that the places they came from and the memories of the food that they carried had an immense bearing on their consumption patterns. Out of the consumers that we interviewed, many showed a preference for the foods from their geographical cultures and religious affiliations. We interviewed an Italian couple who liked *naan*, for its resemblance to a pizza crust back home, and a bunch of students from Maharashtra who were in search of spicy and meaty flavours, similar to those from their state. Many also came out of custom, following the legacy of their fathers and forefathers. Over tea, a man at Ashok Chaat Bhandar told us, “Our daughters, daughters-in-law, and their daughters-in-law, and great-grandchildren, everyone has been here for food. They all come here to eat. It is a family tradition!” (Anonymous, personal communication, February 8, 2020).

Ram Gidwani of Chaina Ram told us how post Partition, his family moved from Lahore to Chandni Chowk. The shop, which was originally in Lahore moved to Chandni Chowk with his family, and alongwith came most of the workers and cooks.

We have a lot of customers coming from Lahore. They are really fond of some of our dishes. They like it, and they have carried it back there. I have no idea why, but they do carry this *namkeen* back. We have people coming from Lahore and Pakistan and they remember how this shop used to stand in Anarkali before the partition. So, there is a burning desire that they have to go and visit this shop one day, once again (R. Gidwani, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

Chaina Ram and many other shops' patrons had linkages to the shops' history and locations. Connections were embossed out of a longing for one's own food, and food soon became an embodiment of one's roots and cultural heritage.

...

In the course of our interactions, we realised that not only was memory a source for creation of food, but also food was an indelible source of many fond memories.

Sanjay Agarwal, producer of Shyam Sweets told us how his shop's food was relished by the Gandhi-Nehru family and ex-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee:

Big leaders and big people used to stay in Delhi. Their food consumption was largely from a few selective shops. Ours was one of them. There are many stories. During World War II, our grandfather supplied food to authorities. We got orders for *laddoos*, *kachoris*, *puri-sabji*, and *jalebis* for soldiers. Our food also used to go to the Nehru family. Indiraji really loved our food (S. Agarwal, personal communication, February 9, 2020).

Ram Gidwani, upon being asked where his roots lay, responded saying:

Of course, I have my roots in Delhi. I'm not a Pakistani, I'm a Hindu from Delhi. But, I would say that I have my roots back in Lahore. How can I forget that? My parents and my grandparents are from Lahore. I always wanted to go to Anarkali where we had our shop, but I never got the opportunity. I also have my cricketer friends staying in Pakistan, and I feel like going and meeting them but I was never able to (R. Gidwani, personal communication, February 10, 2020).

The shops of Chandni Chowk had become fascinating repositories of lives and narratives of all those who have come and gone, standing testament to the rise and fall of several Empires, epochs and mass movements.

...

Some say memory is an act of recollection, an advancement of remembrance, the unrelenting exercise to process, save and secure an eternity of affects, of all there ever was. Some say memory resides in the succulent mangoes they once ate in their *Nani's* home.

Others say it rests truly upon that one unfaltering sunshine of an evening, with the wind in their hair, and the hands of those they once loved briefly touching theirs. And yet few who claim it never left the throes of that dilapidated city theatre which smelt of popcorn stale and seats red, as boys played truant and school was precariously escaped to enjoy films after films.

But to call and confine memory to only an act of recollection is a grave injustice, for memory also creates and conspires to imagine. The narratives of Chandni Chowk belie the employment of memory only in the intangible or the vacuum, and push it to the fore of sociological, anthropological, culinary discourse which can be unpacked using these very individual narratives that build Chandni Chowk's culinary practices into an institution.

That is to say, many of the shops in Chandni Chowk have prevailed for so long that communities have been built and raised around them. The shops have withstood the entirety of some epochs, so much so that their identity is almost intrinsic to the community they serve. It would then be safe to posit that memory exists subliminally at the heart of Chandni Chowk in three levels: In the migratory processes by which people use memory to recreate and hold on to past, the way in which memory itself plays out diachronically and forges relationships between the foodways and the community, and the mechanism through which memory ties into the positionality of consumers, constantly beckoning them back to the streets of Chandni Chowk.

Memory does not exist in vacuum. This is a fact echoed none more so than in a space such as Chandni Chowk. The memory of the community of Chandni Chowk has had an unignorable impact and influence in shaping the foodways of Chandni Chowk and concretizing its position as the infallible ethos of Delhi.

And perhaps that is why:

See, my happiness comes from the fact that people who come here go back happy because of our food. The elders give us blessings and tell us that we have kept the legacy of our ancestors alive. There are people who have seen five generations of our family and whenever they come here, they bless us. The responsibility of keeping the legacy alive in itself is a big thing. Yes, we do earn enough money but this legacy is

above it. Our customers are like family to us. – Thoughts on legacy, heritage, and stories of memories. (Anonymous, personal communication, February 12, 2020)

CONCLUSION



Day 1

As the fifteen of us huddled in the confines of a classroom large and quiet, it soon became evident that our academic inclinations ranged far and wide, with little in common. Some wanted a project with sociological leanings, others with a keen environmental facet. Amidst the squabbling, heckling and negotiating, some of us found ourselves curious about the food scene in Chandni Chowk. We knew nothing. But we also knew there was something, an X factor, some charm, something that drafted it into the vocabulary of history and culinary capitals of India. Some of us were curious and clueless. Others eventually responded, “Let’s find out.”

Day 24

Soon, the onslaught of food blogs and vlogs on Chandni Chowk flooded our preliminary literature review and they all vicariously pointed to one thing: There is more to the foodways of Chandni Chowk than meets the eye. As research moved forth it became clear that the foodways have had an infallible role in shaping the cultural identity of Old Delhi. That the consumption of food must be looked at and studied not in terms of quality, but in terms of how the quality and production is intrinsically married to Chandni Chowk’s position in India’s history.

Day 63

Eventually, with the insurmountable literature at our disposal, a few themes emerged. We had no clue how to cogently link these themes together; how to coherently string a singular narrative out of these. But we knew these were important themes, and with healthy doses of hope that we could eventually make sense of this thematic and theoretical mess we were in, we took a leap of faith. The emergent themes were Migration, Memory and Identity.

Day 124

At this point, with the literature that we had examined, preparatory interviews conducted with academics and data that we could extrapolate, we arrived at a few more surmises. We felt that migration had an enormous impact on the culinary culture of Chandni Chowk. This had minimally been observed and studied from the lens of food. Invariably, migration implicated foodways founding themselves on affects and memories. The

temporality and historicity of Chandni Chowk made authenticity an inevitable playing field. To be or not be?

Day 149

Prior to our field trip, we had opinions. Post our visit, most came to fruition. Migration brought with it a repository of varied culinary cultures and customs; memory became the locus on which both food was produced and consumed. The links forged between buyers, the shops and their foods were often so unique to a given time and space that consumption transcended taste and was based on codes of nostalgia and memory. Authenticity too acquired new connotations and sought to be read and written about differently; how for spaces mired in tradition and time it must be read through the lenses of temporality, legacy and affectivity.

Day 201

200 odd days after we first sat down as a group, two things emerged distinctly. One: memory, migration and authenticity had historically altered the course of foodways in Chandni Chowk. These foodways dramatically shaped and helped construct a cultural identity that had survived three different empires, several crises and a long and gruelling course of history. Two: Our roles as researchers moved from studying Chandni Chowk institutionally to reading in terms of an institution embedded in questions of time. We collectively felt a distinct responsibility to privilege, as critically as possible, those narratives that had been crucial in the creation of a culinary space. As researchers, we recognized the onus of our own position, and how our work would create, construct and further Chandni Chowk's own cultural heritage. And we hoped to have done justice to it.

Day 136, On-field

It is 2020 and I never want to leave this place. If there is one thing that my courtship with Chandni Chowk has taught me, it is that stories matter. I had no idea what this project was or where it was going. How on Earth does one record memory, migration and food anyway? But that does not matter anymore. For the people I have met, the stories I have heard and the moment that has captured me, remind me that our job here is to pen those narratives sans wretched reason. I hope our story finds its way and unveils that which has occupied a unique space in history for reasons unthinkable. Can I produce something

coherent? Perhaps not. Reasons? There are no reasons. It is 2020. I have no idea when or how we arrived here but I do not desire to leave.

– Group Member's Personal On-field Journal Entry; February 2020

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Glossary

1. *Arhar*: Yellow coloured lentil, widely used in Indian cooking.
2. *Axis Mundi*: A pivot point in the street.
3. *Basant*: The season of spring.
4. *Bazaar*: Market area/marketplace.
5. *Bhartha*: An Indian dish which is roasted and mashed together, then cooked in spices; Usually made from brinjal or tomato.
6. *Bhatura / Bhature*: A large deep-fried Indian flatbread.
7. *Black Whole Urad*: Black gram.
8. *Chaat*: An Indian savoury snack made with boiled vegetables, and spices.
9. *Channe Ki Dal*: Soup-like gravy made from split chickpea lentils.
10. *Chhola / Chhole*: Usually used to refer to the gravy made from the lentil chickpeas.
11. *Dal*: A gravy dish prepared with dried, split pulses.
12. *Daulat ki Chaat*: A sweet dish which is air-light and made from churned milk.
13. *Gajar Ka Halwa*: A sweet Indian dish made with carrots, sugar and milk.
14. *Galis*: Narrow streets.
15. *Garam Masala*: Grounded or powdered spices.
16. *Gola Kebab*: Different meats cooked in the shape of a sphere.
17. *Gujiya*: A deep-fried sweet dumpling.
18. *Halwa*: A sweet Indian dish, usually garnished with dry fruits
19. *Halwai*: A cook who make *halwa* and other sweets
20. *Hamam Dasta*: Mortar and pestle.
21. *Havelis*: Mansions.
22. *Holi*: The festival of colours, celebrating the arrival of spring in India.
23. *Jalebi*: Deep-fried batter of flour soaked in sugar syrup, made in the shape of coils.
24. *Kachori*: A deep-fried pocket stuffed with spiced lentils and potatoes.
25. *Karachi Halwa*: A chewy dessert topped with dry fruits, which is said to have originated in Karachi, Pakistan.
26. *Karmuka*: A weapon; Bow.
27. *Khichdi*: A dish made by steaming rice and lentils.
28. *Khoya*: A sweet dairy product made by curdling milk.
29. *Kulcha / Kulche*: A type of flatbread made with wheat and flour.

30. *Kulfi*: A frozen dessert made from milk.
31. *Laddoo*: An Indian sweet made with flour, sugar and dry fruits in the shape of a sphere.
32. *Maharaja*: King.
33. *Makhan Paneer/ Paneer Makhni*: A dish of cottage cheese cooked in a gravy primarily made from butter.
34. *Makhmal*: A type of velvety fabric.
35. *Malai*: An ingredient made by skimming the top layer of boiled milk.
36. *Masala*: A mixture of spices that are ground together.
37. *Matar Paneer*: A dish of cottage cheese cooked in a gravy with peas.
38. *Mithai Ki Dukaan*: A shop where you get traditional Indian sweets.
39. *Mithai Wala*: A person who owns a sweet shop or sells sweets.
40. *Mohallas*: A residential colony.
41. *Mota Bazaar*: A phrase denoting a marketplace for the rich.
42. *Naan*: A large Indian flatbread traditionally baked in a clay oven.
43. *Namkeen*: A savoury snack that is seasoned with a lot of salt.
44. *Nani*: Maternal grandmother.
45. *Nankhatai*: Shortbread biscuits.
46. *Pakoda*: Fritters made by deep-frying vegetables or meat dipped in flour batter.
47. *Palak Paneer*: A dish of cottage cheese cooked in a gravy made from spinach and cream.
48. *Paneer Butter Masala*: A dish of cottage cheese served in a spicy gravy.
49. *Paneer*: Cottage cheese.
50. *Parantha*: Thick flatbread, usually filled with vegetables.
51. *Pav Bhaji*: A fast food dish consisting of spicy vegetable gravy and toasted buns.
52. *Purani Dilli*: Old Delhi.
53. *Puri-Sabji*: Vegetable curry alongside small fried flatbreads made from flour.
54. *Rotis*: Thin, round flatbreads made from wheat flour.
55. *Sanjha Chulha*: Cook-stove made from animal dung or crop residue.
56. *Seths*: A social status given to someone rich, usually working as a merchant or banker.

57. *Shahi Paneer*: A dish of cottage cheese cooked in a gravy made of cream, tomatoes and onions.
58. *Tadka*: A mix of different spices, garlic and onion heated/fried in oil or clarified butter.
59. *Tandoor*: A clay oven used for cooking different meats and flatbreads.
60. *Tawa*: A large pan, either flat or concave disc-shaped.
61. *Tikka*: Similar to a cutlet that is marinated in a gravy.
62. *Tikki*: A small deep-fried patty usually made out of potato.
63. *Ustaad*: Urdu/Punjabi for teacher, master or expert.
64. *Vastu Sastra*: Translates to ‘Science of Architecture’; The traditional Indian system of architecture, utilizing geometric patterns and directional alignments.

