

## **A Culinary Voyage to St. Andrews**

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**Abstract:** Culinary landscapes are forms of communication rich with meanings and represent our attitudes, practices, symbols and rituals. A study of foodways often constitutes and is inclusive of how we obtain, prepare, and consume food. The methods by which food shapes and is shaped by social constructs are crucial to the examination of food ways. Since consumption of food is socially constructed, it is an integral part of culture and an expression of our cultural identity. St Andrews is bequeathed with a multicultural food heritage. It has over the centuries managed to beautifully absorb and blend with the traditional culinary practices there by enriching and enhancing the native cuisine. But the difference lies in the fact that it has in no way diminished the essential colonial flavour.

**Keywords:** Culinary Landscapes, St. Andrews, Foodways, Kerala, Colonial

Culinary landscapes are illustrative of cultural boundaries and often reflect our most basic beliefs about the world and ourselves. It is a form of communication rich with meaning and it represents our attitudes, practices, symbols and rituals. A study of foodways often constitutes and is inclusive of how we obtain, prepare, and consume food. Although all humans need food to survive, people's food habits are the result of learned behaviours. Most often we tend to associate certain foods with specific places. These collective memories and behaviours, as well as the values and attitudes they seem to reflect usually constitute a group's popular culture. The methods in which food shapes and is shaped by social constructs are crucial to examination of food ways. Since consumption of food is socially constructed, it is an integral part of culture and an expression of our cultural identity. A study of food ways is essential to our understanding of social identity. It tries to comprehend what belongs within a particular kind of cuisine and in doing so define what does not. They tie food to a place and in doing so analyses the intersection of food in culture, traditions, and history. Food is very much a part of popular culture. The beliefs, practices, and trends in a culture has its effect on the eating practices also. But these stereotypes start to blur as cultures borrow, appropriate, re-

create and re-consume. But what gets eaten, by whom, on whose terms and when? Which regimes of knowledge are at play in the matter of these exchanges?

Among the major historical processes that have altered various culinary practices, food ways and systems of production, in the last few centuries, colonialism stands out as one that raises many of these questions. There is a lot more to colonisation than just establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. It leads to the intermingling of cultures, traditions and even cuisines and has a distinct influence on the foodscape of a place. European powers in India left a lasting impression on our culinary heritage. They came to India for trade and brought their techniques of cooking with them. Over the course of many years they made India their home but craved home food. They had to make do with what was available in India. This gradual assimilation was also a way of preserving their traditional food culture. This gradually led to an imbibing of native food culture, resulting in a culinary heritage which went deep beyond sustenance, recipes or taste. Food habits and food consumption are affected by acculturation on different levels. Traditional food habits often tend to be discreet and changes which eventually occur tend to be a relatively slow process. Introduction of new food recipes is affected by various factors like religion, the availability of native ingredients, convenience and cost. Therefore, an immediate change is very unlikely to occur. Different cultures have different ways in which they prepare, serve, preserve and eat their food. When exposed to another culture for an extended period of time, individuals tend to take aspects of the host culture's food customs and implement them with their own. In cases such as these, acculturation is heavily influenced by general food knowledge, or knowing the unique kinds of food different cultures traditionally have and by social interaction. It allows for different cultures to be exposed to one another, causing some aspects to intertwine and also become more acceptable.

European powers left an enduring effect on our culinary landscape. The first among the Europeans to establish a colony in India at the beginning of the 16th century were the Portuguese. Among the first Portuguese settlements in India were Cochin and Goa. Over the next four centuries, Portuguese control spread to various parts of India, mostly along the west coast of the country, but also in the northeast, particularly in Bengal. The Portuguese influence left an indelible impression on the culinary heritage of India. They introduced new ingredients to India, including certain spices, vegetables and fruits which are now an integral part of Indian cuisine. They also introduced Portuguese dishes which were gradually adapted and integrated to Indian culinary techniques and tastes. The most impressive Portuguese influence was of course in Goa, which Portugal ruled until 1961. In particular, Goan catholic food is marked by a distinct Portuguese flavour. Further down the coast from Goa is the city of Mangalore, and similarities are there in Goan and Mangalorean Catholic cuisine. Moving to the other side of India, some Portuguese influence can be seen in Bengali cuisine as well. Portuguese influence further south is evident in Kerala and particularly in Fort Kochi, one of the earliest Portuguese settlements in India. The mingling of Portuguese and traditional Kerala cuisine saw the introduction of exceptional culinary techniques and practices

which remain unparalleled even today. For example, the Portuguese introduced steaming and baking, with ovens heated with coal, techniques never before known in Kerala. 'Puttu' is considered to be a result of Portuguese experimentation done with powdered rice. They steamed the rice powder and found it to be an easy food to make on long ship voyages from Kerala. They introduced red chillies and vinegar as cooking ingredients and used to pickle dried meats in vinegar and paprika which eventually found their way in traditional Kerala cuisine. Thus, it is only natural that already existing traditions take upon new avatars with an intermingling of different culinary practices. When we deconstruct an ingredient, we become fully aware of the many many stories attached to it. Food memories are a wonderful way to document a family's or community's history as culture is definitely shared through food. As food is intrinsically connected with identity, a culinary journey inevitably churns out submerged narratives, hidden and unacknowledged from mainstream culture.

St. Andrews, a relatively unknown sea side hamlet just fifteen kilometres away from the capital city of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram is a landscape steeped in history and culture with untold narratives of colonial encounters. The scenic coast lined with coconut trees and a golden sandy pristine beach is the last place one expects to encounter a robust and flavoursome Portuguese legacy. History attest to the fact that this was a sizeable Portuguese settlement, though relatively secluded. The name St. Andrews itself is derived from the Portuguese "Sandandarae" or "Santo Andarae" which means Saint Andrew. Apart from the mesmerising beach, what attracts the first-time visitor is of course the beautiful church facing the sea, named after St. Andrew, the patron saint of fishermen and singers. The church remains a unique landmark in the tapestry of the village as it has the rare distinction of having the place name and church name as one. The church belongs to the Latin Catholic Christian community and has a rich heritage dating back to the Portuguese with its exquisite stained-glass windows radiating the vintage charm of the place. The Church was built entirely of Rosewood by the Portuguese, but as years passed the structure has taken on a modern form. The Church and the surroundings still retain its unmistakable European heritage. Even the cemetery shaded by ancient trees and the graves marked by strange Portuguese names adds to the allure of its fascinating past. The fishing hamlet comes alive with a lot of festivities during the Christmas-New Year season and also on St. Andrews day which is celebrated with much fanfare on November 30. Apart from its obvious European heritage it also has a noticeable Tamil influence as people from Tamil Nadu settled here in the past mainly for the purpose of trade. Traces of Tamil culture can be discerned from the church songs which are a curious mixture of Portuguese and Tamil. The Portuguese influence has lent a distinctiveness to the culture of the place which finds its clear manifestation, especially in the aspect of language and cuisine. The Portuguese legacy has deeply enriched and enhanced the culinary heritage of St Andrews and has led to the amalgamation of different cultures. The vast and intricate layers of food culture are often overlooked and tend to become obscure over the years. In order to explore and further understand the culture and history of a place it is often observed that the study can be made more engrossing and fascinating by examining the culinary practices of that particular region.

Taking into consideration the historical and cultural impact of food on the heritage of St Andrews, it is very much evident that the most singular and distinctive influence on St. Andrews without doubt remains the Portuguese legacy. The colonial food influence is steeped into the very fabric of the community that it is almost impossible to separate it from regional influences. This was indeed a natural metamorphosis that took place when different cultures came into contact with each other. Because of the Portuguese influence, the food prepared in many households in St Andrews bear an uncanny resemblance to Goan cuisine. They have an unique taste, flavour, and even quaint names attached to them which are very different from that of traditional Kerala cuisine. The dishes which have a clear Portuguese origin and which enjoys popularity in St Andrews includes: Pork Vindaloo, Baked Chicken Mince, Scone, *Tharidosi*, *Orappam*, Churl Appam and Plum Cake. The distinctive food habits of St Andrews have indeed led to some interesting culinary observations. For instance, Pork Vindaloo, which is often identified with Anglo Indian and Goan cuisine is a popular dish in St Andrews. The name Vindaloo is derived from the Portuguese dish ‘Carne de Vinha d’Alhos’, which is pork with wine and garlic. In the St Andrews version of vindaloo recipe, wine is substituted by vinegar and chilies. Along with pork vindaloo, fish vindaloo also finds its place in the cuisine of St Andrew. It is considered very much different from that of the Goan Vindaloo recipe although it shares some basic ingredients. Though the taste of each vindaloo curry differs, all the dishes have a common tangy taste. It is quite strange and incredible that people are unaware of such a thriving Portuguese culinary tradition at a seaside village very much near to the capital city. Another snack which finds a special place in St Andrews cuisine is the Scone, a baked good, which has a distinct European origin, to be more precise Scottish. Surprisingly Scone is an everyday evening snack quite popular with the folks of this remote seaside village. But the most sought-after delicacy of St. Andrews is the Milk halwa which remains exclusive to this region. The chance of hearing about this halwa is remote even if you are a native of Thiruvananthapuram, as only a few are aware about its existence. Moreover only a few persons remain who possess the knowledge to make this delicious sweet. The origin of this unique recipe is attributed to the various culinary influences over the centuries. The basic ingredients that go into the making of this delicious Milk Halwa are milk, maida, sugar and butter. Although it is named as Milk Halwa it has a very pronounced Portuguese influence. It finds no similarities with the traditional halwas with which we are familiar and its creamy texture and flavour has more in common with European sweets. The process of making this delicacy is tedious as it takes more than eight hours of preparation time. It used to have a special place in weddings of yore but now it is made by only one family residing at St Andrews. Another recipe which has a distinct Portuguese history is *Tharidosi*. It is usually prepared during Christmas and New Year celebrations. Several members of the community of St Andrews have immigrated to countries like Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia over the past few years. This migration has further added to the diversity of its food practices and introduced without doubt a new set of culinary practices. St Andrews remains an interesting potpourri of various culinary influences including Portuguese, Sri Lankan, Singaporean, Malaysian and of course the regional Kerala flavour. Distinctive cooking

styles have evolved in St. Andrews from the intermingling of colonial influences and local ingredients. A thread, however, runs through the food recipes of all these communities and people living in St Andrew, which of course is distinctly Portuguese in flavour. The culinary legacy of St Andrews finds its significance in the fact that it has remained almost intact all through all these years, maintaining its distinct European heritage. It also calls attention to the importance of examining in detail untold and silenced colonial narratives.

St Andrews is indeed bequeathed with a multicultural food heritage. It has over the centuries managed to beautifully absorb and blend with the traditional culinary practices there by enriching and enhancing the native cuisine. But the difference lies in the fact that it has in no way diminished the essential colonial flavour. There is a delightful medley of food everywhere, rich in history and high on taste, the recipes serving effectively as a documentation, a proof of colonial legacy, assimilation and diversity of our food culture. Over the centuries, cuisines in India have imbibed a variety of colonial influences revealing how deep and fascinating the history of food can be. It is this plurality of cultures and the food heritage which makes St Andrews an alluring mix of unique flavours. St. Andrews has the enviable position of a remote and relatively obscure coastal village with an interesting melting pot of several cultures and traditions. But it also serves as a reminder that the distinct Luso Indian heritage of St Andrews remains largely unmapped, undiscovered and submerged in comparison with mainstream narratives. While tracing the lineages of these dishes may prove both fascinating and arduous, the fact remains that a delectable legacy continues to endure unacknowledged.

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