

## SPICES AND CONDIMENTS

Spices and Condiments play a very important role in the Kashmirī Culinary Art and their Cuisine, especially in the Dishes of Kashmirī Pandīts.

Kashmīr, being on the ancient 'Silk Route'. the traders in Indian Spices, from all over the world, passed through this valley and generally stayed here as visitors, to enjoy the salubrious summer climate and also to sell non-local spices and buy locally produced saffron, spices, medicinal herbs and roots, dry fruits and 'Shāwls' etc.

Kashmīrī Pandīts inherited the knowledge of medicinal values and aromatic qualities of different spices and condiments, from ancient Sanskrīt Texts of 'Āyurvedā'. The use of these and their availability, in almost all Kashmirī houses, was and is common. Hardly there is any spice or condiment which is not available from a Kashmirī Grocer or a 'Pansārī'. In fact, a class of traders called 'Buhuer' sprang up in due course to deal especially in spices and medicinal herbs, roots, seeds and minerals.

Learning the special use of local spices, herbs and condiments, and of those introduced by the outsiders, hundreds of exquisite dishes were developed by Kashmirīs. These include both vegetarian and non-vegetarian preparations. Some are hot, sweet or sour, some fragrant and spicy and others soft or crunchy and so on. Here, thus, matured the art of blending of different spices, in right proportions, in order to prepare foods with variable flavours and aromas. These were developed to a sort of perfection, to suit different seasons and occasions, and also the tastes of both Indians and Foreigners.

To cater to the ever growing demands, a class of professional expert cooks and chefs grew up, who competed with one another for producing exquisite dishes. Culinary art of Kashmir also got impetus through the patronage of affluent people who permanently engaged expert cooks. The 'patrons' vied with one another, by throwing dinner parties, in which their special dishes were served and these were talked about by guests afterwards for days together. Even now some have become reminiscences for some people of older generation, who give graphic description of such feasts.

Spices and condiments are used freely, and in good quantities, by Kashmirī Pandīts. Kashmirī Muslims use these commonly called 'Masālc' sparingly, but there is predominance of Onion, Garlic and Shallot in both their Meat and Vegetarian preparations. Shallot is called 'Pṛan' in Kashmir. It is not used in Pandīt kitchens. Now, in recent years Onions and Garlic are used in a few of their Vegetable and Meat Curries. Pandīts use Asafoetida ('Hīṅg') instead of Onions, Garlic or Shallots.

Therefore, for those who are eager to learn the Kashmirī Culinary Art, the knowledge of different Spices, Condiments and ingredients used by Kashmirīs, is primarily necessary. Knowing proper methods of processing and preservation of these, before their use, is also essential. A comprehensive note follows regarding this and also a list of all these Spices, Condiments, and previously prepared Mixtures and 'Cakes' of Spices, for ready use is given.



