

Cucurbits A Glorious Symbol of Punjabi Culture

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Cucurbits have always been the preferred food items of Punjabi people since ancient times. Some of these cucurbits used to grow during their favourable season such as Chibbar, Phut, Tumma, JharKarela, Mateera and Kharbuja etc. whereas, some types of these natural vegetable foods were grown particularly by the farmers such as Ghia Kaddu, Tori, Lauki, Petha, Kheera, Karela, chappan kaddu, etc. Impoverished masses of Punjab used to consume these food item(s) as a substitute of the costly fruits available in the urban areas. These masses used to prepare Chutteny of Chibbar (a part of meal) as a substitute for the cooked vegetables. i.e. why all these above mentioned delicious vegetables had always remained a part and parcel of our culture, tradition, family bonds and folklore also since “*Sindhu Ghati Civilization*”. These above-mentioned delicious vegetable food items were quite popular even amongst the children of the society. Children prefer these vegetables and used to search the bag(s) of the head of their families who returned home after working in the field(s). Most of the people in villages used to gather and enjoy the taste of these delicious cucurbit fruits by sharing the delicacies made of these. Such actions and traditional beliefs are symbol of the unity, integrity and brotherhood at the village level. Some of the folklores referring to these vegetables are also associated with sentiments, feelings and thoughts and reflected in their folklores in the form of sound, poems, and phrases etc. For example, when a person used to express their highest degree of resentment against somebody then the following suitable adage was used “*Ik Karela dooja Nimm Chadeya*”. It means in vernacular language that the Neem tree and Karela vine are highly bitter in taste which is an indication of high degree of resentment in human behaviour against somebody.

There is one more phrase quite popular amongst the Punjabi people about melon (Kharbuja) i.e. “*Kharbuje nu vekh ke Kharbuja rang badalda*” which again is innuendo of human psyche and style of living. In simple words, it gives the expression of human behaviour, where one tries to mimic somebody by adopting these changes seen in somebody you envy.



Some Punjabi folk songs are also highly connected with the cucurbit crops in which female folklore is linked to cucurbits is "*Kharbuje wargi jatti kha layi ve kale naag ne*" to reflect glamour of Punjabi farm women, comparing them to black cobra quite commonly visible in the fields were working in quite hazardous. Another Punjabi folklore song which again express the relationship between ornament, cucurbit crops and beauty of Punjabi woman such as "*Gori gal da bane kharbuja, Dandian di bel ban je*" which simply means a young lover is of the view regarding the beauty of his beloved that her facial beauty should be mimic as Kharbuja.

The crops mentioned above are highly productive and used as fruits, in preparing vegetables and other food stuffs such as chutney and pickle (Achaar) which are also part of meal. Jharkarela (Varh Karela) is very popular in the western malwa region of Punjab which is a natural crop in barren land in the rainy season. It is the fruit of Jhar Karela is also used as medicine for the treatment of diabetic patient. Looking at the nutritive value of these cucurbits because of easy digestivity and many other usages viz. antidiabetic, hypo- glycemc activity and anti-tumor properties. These days also, various companies have come up with juices extracted from these as value added products, which are being marketed at exorbitant prices, with benefits for cure of diabetes/ digestive disorders and weight loss products. The farmers need to be made aware about the cucurbits use for enhancing their income vis-à-vis economic upliftment and taking them along.



So far as traditional fruit known as Tumma is concerned it is also used as Ayurvedic medicine for the treatment of imbalanced digestive system in animals and human beings. It is used in form of paste (Churn) of dry fruits of Tumma which are considered as a medicine of high quality for the treatment of all types of problems related to digestive system. One more cucurbit crop known as Wanga which is grown particularly in western Punjab area of Ferozpur and Fazilka district. It is used as delicious types of salad which is unique in the world. The folklore, songs etc. associated with these vegetables for the entertainment and preserving the archaic culture.