**The case for the samosa as national snack**

There was a debate recently on what should be India’s national dish or item of food. Someone came up with the tasteless (pun intended) and absurd idea of khichdi. Really? This bland and colourless mishmash of rice and lentils as our national food? All it does is to remind you of your sick- bay days when you were advised by doctors and sadistic members of your family to consume it because it is “light” and “easily digested”.

On the one hand you are bed-ridden with no contact with the outside world and not much to look forward to for the day, and then comes khichdi. A watery mixture of overcooked cereals, the fun-sucking stuff that still tastes bland even after copious amounts of desi ghee and heaps of mango achaar. I vote a thunderous no! for khichdi.

But what could be India’s national food, it is easier to build a consensus on mango, which is India’s national fruit as the banyan could be India’s national tree for cultural and historical reasons. But one food item as a national emblem of India’s gastronomical delights? It is hard to pick one… from north India’s chhole bhature and kadai chicken to the south’s idli-dosa-sambar, or from the west’s dhokla and dal-bati to the east’s machher jhol and litti-chokha.

India’s cuisine is as varied and colourful as its people. Every few kilometres the food changes according to local customs and tastes, but what doesn’t change is the appealing texture and the mouth-watering taste. Whether you prefer saatvik food or you are a hardcore non-vegetarian, India’s cuisine provides a delicious option for everyone. We have at times modified exotic cuisines to our own taste… so the slightly boring and bland Chinese and Middle Eastern cuisine is spiced up with loads of masala, in road-side stalls in bazaars and posh restaurants alike.

But as a north Indian I am deeply biased and my vote is reserved for the samosa, a triangular piece of bliss! This deep-fried packet of potatoes and peas wrapped in kneaded dough is an absolute riot. As soon as you take a bite it melts in your mouth, with a combination of crispy dough and mushy mixture of potatoes and peas exploding in your mouth like fireworks.

Samosa is the comfort food one can rely on anytime. Whether it is a summer afternoon, rainy August or wintry December, samosa never disappoints. You can be an overworked employee, an exhausted mother, a stressed-out student or one dealing with a bad break-up, samosa always provides solace and comfort. One bite and all your worries melt away. Consume it with tea or coffee, with chutney or ketchup, with friends or colleagues, and it always works. They say marriages are made in heaven, but I am pretty sure they are facilitated by a shared love for samosa between the bride and groom.

The love for this deep-fried delight has been exported to other countries as well by the Indian diaspora. From the United States and Europe to the Middle East and other parts of the world, the samosa has made its mark and has been accepted as a slightly weird but adorable damaad in the household.

So, to sum it all up we are a unique culture with many customs and dialects, worlds within a world and willing to accommodate everyone, and therefore it is hard to pick one item as our national food. But the samosa makes for a strong contender, and it’s right up there along with pasta for the Italians or cheese for the French.