

Liquid

Lock, Stock and Can

Ready-to-Drink Cocktails

Climate Change

It Is Not All Bad

Traditional Drinks

From Around India



Photo: thedailywrite.net

India's Traditional Liquids Part I

The traditional drinks of India are complex, eclectic and multi-dimensional, with an exuberance of colour and flavour. Some heavy, some light, each has a nutritional purpose, a distinctive taste, and a climatic benefit. In the first part of this feature, I bring you a round-up of some classics – truly legendary beverages from across the length and breadth of the country.

Lassi

Lassi is an heirloom of Punjab as famous as its yellow mustard fields. Cold yogurt spiced with cumin and salt and whipped into a creamy, uniform consistency, Lassi cools every overheated nerve in your body. A delicious concoction best served in a tall silver glass, it can be almost as heavy as a meal.



Connoisseurs believe that the trick lies in using home-made curd for just the right natural thickness. Another trick: add a little milk and instead of an electric blender, use the traditional wooden whisk, rotating it in alternate directions to work up a froth whilst retaining the grainy texture. Add ice and *malai* (cream of milk) and serve in a *kulhad* (earthen pot) to counter the Indian summer.

Lassi can be sweet, salty, spicy, or imbued with hues of rose, mango, strawberry flavors. Add a few crushed almonds to up its exotic quotient. If you need any more convincing, Ayurveda prescribes Lassi to tackle dehydration and heat stroke.

Neer Mor & Paannagam

Lassi's south Indian avatar is Neer Mor (buttermilk), made from watered curd. This concoction ably complements the spiciness of Tamilian cuisine and aids digestion. Matrons from down south will confess that the trick is in the quantity of ginger added, which must be as finely ground as possible, with *kari-patta* leaves and salt to taste. Neer Mor is a hot favourite during the Onam festivities.

Paannagam is a sweet beverage from south India, usually served to complement the savoury Neer Mor. Made of water and *gur* (jaggery), it is infinitely soothing. Finely ground ginger is added with *elaichi*

(cardamom). Surprisingly, these ingredients don't reduce the sweetness but add a flair of flavour. For extra vitamins and another subtle favour, add crushed Neem flowers.



Neer Mor



Paannagam

The duo of Neer Mor and Paannagam are served during *Ram Navmi* (birth of Lord Rama) celebrations, which also mark the beginning of summer.

Kala Khatta

Remember those Jamun (blackberry) trees that once lined the streets, making the roads purple with their fallen berries? The juice of the berries is named for its

almost-black colour (*kala*) and sour taste (*khatta*). It is a powerhouse of nutrition, rich in iron and vitamin C.

Mostly found in syrup form, add your preferred dose of sweet to make it more palatable. A barman's secret? Virgin Kala Khatta – Kala Khatta syrup, sugar syrup, 3-4 ice cubes topped up with soda and a slice of lemon. It is also made into ice-lollies called 'Gola' – crushed ice granules closely pressed together on a wooden stick.

Kokum

Just when you think you are replete with the natural splendor and beaches of Goa and the Konkan area, there comes another gift to relish. Borne from the Kokum plant, Kokum sherbet is a natural coolant.

The traditional drinks of India are complex, eclectic and multi-dimensional.

To make your own Kokum sherbet, grind and strain the pulp and skin, and add the paste to a sugar syrup of your making. Refrigerate this liquid and add to water to drink. It is good for diabetic patients, helps



Kala Khatta



Kokum

in digestion and is also considered effective against cancer, anxiety, and depression.

To make the drink healthier, add only as much sugar as needed to counter the sourness of Kokum, or use jaggery instead. Add cumin powder and cardamom for a sherbet with a twist.

Thandai

The origins of Thandai may not be clear, but all agree that this milk-based spiced drink is well suited to

the hot Indian summer. Records date back to 1000 BC, making Thandai one of India's oldest drinks. An integral part of Holi celebrations, Thandai is better-known in its mischievous avatar, *Bhaang*.

Thandai means 'something that cools'. It is versatile in terms of ingredients. In addition to milk and sugar, one can add almonds, cardamom, rose water, saffron, pepper, fennel, cinnamon powder and watermelon seeds. When infused with a paste of cannabis (flowers and leaves of the plant are crushed in a pestle), it is called *Bhaang* – an intoxicating liquid rendered with divine blessings, as Lord Shiva was considered to be a patron.

Left to itself, Thandai is actually quite healthy, with digestion-enabling ingredients. The modern twist to Thandai is a vegan version with almond or oat milk.

What a divine collection of liquids, and these are just the tip of the iceberg. Travel deeper and further into India and many more local gems will emerge. More in the next issue! [1](#)

Nandita Kaushik is a creative writer, content writer, blogger and poet who fell in love with words at age 9.



Thandai