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Fasting and feasting during Ramadan-ul-Moazzam - a cross-sectional Anthropological study of the Alavi Bohra Muslims migrated from Yemen to Western India

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Yemeni migrants *Alavi Bohras* settled in the Vadodara city of Gujarat, India, is a minority community, and follows distinct customs and food patterns which need documentation.

Aim: The present study aimed to assess the customs and culture of the Alavi Bohra community of Vadodara during *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* using ethnographic research methodology.

Materials and Methods: An ethnographic study was conducted engaging the royals, community leaders and at-Taiyeba Committee members as the key informants and over 120 women of Alavi Bohra Community. Qualitative research methodologies such as narratives, concept testing, direct observations, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were used to understand the ethnography of food and culture of Alavi Bohra Muslims which were supported by photographs of the Iftaar and Sehri, which are the major meals during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*.

Result: Distinct traditional practices such as celebration of *layla-tul-bara*, in the eighth month by praying at night and use of *khak-e-shifa* (the holy soil from the battle ground of Karbala, Iraq) for breaking the fast were noted. The use of food items such as *gol sherbet*, *Onion gota with besan kadhi*, *faluda*, *haleem*, *dahi wada*, *lookni kela*, *tuver dal samosa*, *aaloo bhajia*, *chatpati*, indicate a blend of Gujarati-Yemeni cuisines in their *Iftaar*.

Conclusion: Though Alavi Bohra Muslims of Vadodara city have retained the Yemeni culture, as per the Alavi Misri calendar, this ethnographic research has highlighted that their food habits have a strong influence on the local cuisines of Gujarat.

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1. Introduction

Among the several festivities and fasting regimes of Muslims, *Ramadan*, the ninth lunar month, is of great significance. The fast is observed from dawn (*fajr*, the first prayer that must be offered) till sunset (*maghrib*- fourth obligatory prayer) throughout the month without a single drop of water along with the prayer regimes of this month are varied in different sects of Muslims- the *shiya* and the *sunnis*. Even within these sects, the subjects follow

a different pattern related to food and prayers. Fasting is observed in remembrance of the Holy Quran being revealed to Prophet Muhammad for the first time (*Kassam & Robinson, 2014*).

Based on the calendar followed by each Muslim sect, and the dates of *Ramadan* month gradually change every year and coincide with various seasons making the severity of fast easy to hard. *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* cycles through the calendar year approximately once every 30 years, by shifting by roughly eleven days per year. The number of hours of *roza* during winter *Ramadan* is less compared to the

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summer months when the sun sets after a longer duration. Similarly the time of *Sehri* and *Iftaar* shifts on the basis of dawn and dusk timing respectively (Gharagozlou & Naar, 2022).¹⁻⁹

Pregnant and nursing women are permitted to break the fast if they fear it would be dangerous for them or for their babies if they fast. However, compensatory fast are to be kept after Ramadan for the missed fasts (*Bahammam*, 2016).

1.1. Rationale

Food habits reflect socioeconomic level and cultural identity in the ways chosen for selecting, cooking, and serving food, and all of these elements also have an impact on the general pattern of consumption (Nambiar, 2021).

Alavi Bohras, a nano-minority community, is a sub-sect of *Ismaili Shia* Muslims. The *Misri* lunar calendar, followed by the *Alavi Bohras*, also known as the *Hijri* calendar, was established in the Misr by *Imam Moiz*. They follow the calendar for all religious festivals, *Bara Wafat* (*Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi*), death anniversary of eminent people and missionaries while, feast on occasions of *Eid-ul-Fitra*, *Eid-ul-Adha*, baby shower, marriage and *misaaq* an oath taking ceremony performed by the spiritual head for the individuals of 14-15 years age or just before marriage to denote that individuals shall remain true to the *Alavi* culture.¹⁰⁻¹⁴

2. Objective

The present study is focused on documenting the customs, food culture, and prayer patterns of *Alavi Bohras* of Vadodara city, India, using ethnographic research methodology, during the holy month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam-ul-Moazzam* when their holy book Quran was revealed by the angles of Gods or *farishta*.

3. Materials and Methods

1. *Study Population*: The *Alavi Bohra* population, settled in Vadodara city, Gujarat, India. Of the 8000 *Alavi Bohras* around the world, nearly 6500 people reside in Vadodara, Gujarat, India.
2. *Time frame of the study*: Data for the current study on the ninth month of the *Alavi* calendar *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam-ul-Moazzam* of Hijri Year 1443 was collected from the period 2nd April – 2st May 2022.
3. *Ethnographic research Methods*: Ethnographic research can provide valuable insights into people and how they live, also allows researchers to document a society or group of people. People around the world can then benefit from that knowledge. It provides a different way to collect data about social structures and the way people interact with one another (Mathur, 2021).

Ethnographic research in the present study was conducted engaging the royals, community leaders and at-Taiyebaab Committee members as the key informants and over 120 women of *Alavi Bohra* Community. Qualitative research methodologies such as narratives, concept testing, direct observations, key informant interviews and focus group discussions were used to understand the ethnography of food and culture of *Alavi Bohra* Muslims which were supported by photographs of the *Iftaar* and *Sehri*, which are the major meals during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*. Further concept testing was done of information gathered using various methods and the verbatim of the respondents were recorded and further interpreted.

The ethnographic research conducted to understand the culture was more of an art than science. The cultures and cultural phenomena of this community was not easy to quantify and this interpretation has been done as per the researcher's discretion and understanding.¹⁴⁻¹⁸

Table 1: Ethnographic Methods used in the study

Methods	Purpose
Narratives (n=20)	With the royals and heads of the community to understand the general belief and practices about prayer and food pattern during <i>Ramadan-ul-moazzam</i> month
Key Informant Interviews (n=15)	About traditional recipes made during month of <i>Ramadan-ul-moazzam</i>
Direct Observation (n=20)	Meals and Prayer at the Jamatkhana and Mosque
Focus group Discussion (one)	Group of <i>Alavi Bohra</i> women – group discussion on Ramadan – lifestyle, <i>sehri</i> and <i>Iftaar</i> meal composition

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Overview of the *Alavi Bohra* community in Vadodara city

Vadodara is the cultural capital of Gujarat, located in the West of India. Vadodara has remained the seat of the *Alavi Bohras* heads for 328 years. In Vadodara, *Alavi Bohras* have 4 mosques, 4 community halls, 4 mausoleums in which there are tombs- grave (*quboor*) of *Alavi da'i*. They also have a sectarian religious school named as *Madrasah Taiyebiyah*. Badri Mohalla, Fakhri Mohalla, Mughalwada, Pratapnagar, Panigate, Taiwada and Fatehgunj are the key areas of Vadodara city inhabited by *Alavi Bohra* Muslims.

Community leadership: *Alavi Bohra* Community, since 7 June 2015, is under the spiritual guidance and leadership of 45th *Dai muṭlaq*, Saiyedna Haatim Zakiyuddin *saheb*.

As per the narratives of the community head of the *at-Taiyebaab Alavi Bohra* community, this community has migrated from Yemen and had settled previously in

Ahmedabad and then shifted to Vadodara, Western Gujarat of India.

The Alavi mosque and Alavi calendar: The *Alavi Bohra Noorani Masjid* mosque is situated in *Badri Mohalla*. The concept testing of the narratives revealed that the *Alavi Bohra* have their own calendar, known as the *Alavi Misri* lunar calendar, which is followed by every *Alavi Bohra* member even though he has migrated to another city or country. The days which are marked *Navaaru* on the calendar are not considered auspicious and no good events or functions are conducted on this day. It is available online for the community, and has a converter which converts Islamic date to English calendar. It is religiously referred to for offering prayers. The current study was done in the *hijri* year (H.Y.) 1443 year as per the *Alavi Misri* calendar, which is equivalent to 2021-2022 of the English calendar.

According to the *Alavi Misri* calendar, which is 354 days, and has 12 Islamic months, the *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* is the ninth month and has a special significance in terms of spirituality, control of sense organs and hunger.

The 12 months as per the *Misri* lunar calendar of *Alavi Bohras* are:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Muharram-ul-Haraam | 7) Rajab-ul-asab |
| 2) Safar-ul-Muzaffar | 8) Sha'ban-ul-Kareem |
| 3) Rabi-ul-Awwal | 9) Ramadan-ul-Moazzam |
| 4) Rabi-ul-Aakhar | 10) Shawwal-ul Muakarram |
| 5) Jumadi-ula | 11) Dhu al-Qadahtil Haraam |
| 6) Jumadiul- ukhra | 12) Dhu al-Hijjahtil Haraam |

Fig. 1: An illustration of *Alavi Misri* lunar calendar for Ramadan-ul-Moazzam month



Ramadan-ul-Moazzam is the ninth month of the *Misri* Lunar Calendar as well as the Islamic lunar Calendar. The *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* was celebrated from 2nd of April 2022 to 2nd of May 2022 by *Alavi Bohra* Muslims.

Language spoken and written: *Alavi Bohras* read, write and speak an Arabicized form of Gujarati language, called *Lisaan ud-Da'wat il-'Alaviyah* (LDA) i.e. (blended with Arabic vocabulary), an amalgamation of Arabic, Urdu and Persian words and written in Arabic script. All the correspondence, orders and documentary affairs of *Alavi Bohras* are exclusively carried out in *Lisaan ud-Da'wat il-'Alaviyah*. Religious sermons and congregational lectures during the prayers are held in LDA.

Clothing: A white turban (*paghdi*), is worn by members of the Royal family, including *Da'i* and his close friends, assembly members, and dignitaries. The turban symbolizes distinction, individuality, and respect. *Da'i* and his deputy (*ma'zoon*) may be identified by the little bit of golden fabric that is visible on the front of their turbans. White *kurta-pyjama*, and a unique headgear made of white-silver-golden thread known as *topi* are the traditional clothing for men of the *Alavi Bohra* community. Women wear *rida*, which is a full body full-body veil, that covers them from head to toe. There is no rule about its colour and design. The upper (*pardi*) and bottom (*ghaghro*) sections of a traditional *rida* are adorned with laces and worn together, for all religious and social events. *Rida* is part of the social life and distinctive identity of every *Bohri* woman.

Food Beliefs and practices of the Alavi Bohra community: The answers about the food belief were gathered through the quantitative research included the subjects' views, past experiences and also an understanding of the culture or societal norms which were gathered by listening to what its members had to say.

Thaal Jaman: The unique concept of eating in one big plate of *thaal* is common. The *Thaal jaman* i.e. food /meal (*jaman*) is devoured from a single plate (*thaal*) by a group of 7-8 people sitting on the floor, beginning by tasting a pinch of salt. The *Maa'edah* (Food) – meals are consumed together sitting on the floor at home or in *Jamaat-khana* community hall. It is considered that sociability increases among community members as they sit together and eat from *thaal*.

There are rules/ etiquettes of eating in a '*thaal*' some of which are –

1. Usually 7 people sit together and eat from a single *thaal*,
2. To begin by taking a pinch of salt and reciting "bismillaah"
3. Eat with the right hand
4. Washing hands before and after eating, lick fingers after finishing meal
5. Never leave even a bit of food in the *thaal*

4.2. Ramadan-ul-Moazzam celebrations by the Alavi Bohra community

Though *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* is a holy month celebrated by all Muslims, the *Alavi Bohra* community has a distinctive custom of celebrating this month which is the ninth month in the *Alavi Misri* calendar.

Pre-Ramdan celebrations- Shabaan-ul-kareem: This is a distinctive custom of the *Alavi Bohras* which is not a regular feature by other Muslims such as Sunni Muslims. This is the night of innocence, which is the 15 day of the month *Shabaan-ul-kareem* (eighth month of lunar calendar), and was in the month of Feb- April in the year 2021-

2022 is celebrated as *badi raat* or *Lailat al-Bara* by this community. This is the night of the full moon preceding the beginning of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*, when sins are forgiven and fates are determined for the year ahead and when mosques are illuminated and special sweets such as *suji ka halwa* (ghee based semolina sweet) are prepared at home and are distributed to the poor and the family members.

Special days of Ramadan: The 30 days of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam-ul-Moazzam* are divided into three parts of 10 days each. A part of 10 days is known as *dasko* of which first 10 days of mercy (*pehlo dasko rehmat no*), second 10 days of seeking forgiveness (*bijo dasko istighfar no*) and last 10 days for protection from hell (*tijo dasko jahannum thi chhutvano*).

Of the 30 days, five days are considered very important for prayers and charity. These are the 16th day of the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam-ul-Moazzam* which is also known as *pehla washek*; the 18th day known as *bija washek*; the 20th day known as the *tija washek*; the 21st day and 22nd day known as the *layla-tul-qadr*.

Prayers in the month of Ramadan-ul-Moazzam: During these days, the prayers are elaborate and good wishes are considered as holy nights where the prayers are heard by Allah, following which best wishes are bestowed to all community members for good health and being. Long prayer sessions are conducted at the mosque and attended by both men and women (unlike the Sunni Muslim women who are not allowed on the mosque).

There are two types of *namaz* (prayers) – Obligatory (*farz*) and supererogatory (*nafeel*). To offer any *namaz wudu* is done before prayer, timings are on the basis of sun and its position in the sky. The difference between the prayers of Sunni and Shia is that, *Zohr - Asr namaz and Maghrib-Isha namaz* are combined and offered, while sunni Muslims offer all five obligatory *namaz* at different times post *azaan*. *Azaan* is a call for prayer.

Nisf-ul-layl is an additional prayer offered by the people of *Alavi Bohra Community* around midnight during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*. Whereas other sects of Muslims offer *Taraweeh* as an additional prayer during the 30 days of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* fasting and, concept of *zakat -fitra*.

Month of enlightening your life rather than extending it – *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*, considered as a month that washes away the dirt of evil, laziness, ignorance and wicked thinking. A rejuvenating tonic of love, harmony, friendship and brotherhood for the people. A month to help the needy and poor monetarily. A month that cures all the illnesses of the body with the help of fasting.

The Figure 2 explains the timing, wherein *namaz* prayer is offered during the day. The 24 hours of a day are divided into 4 parts –

1. Sunrise to Zawal (zawal is around 12 pm when sun is overhead and at its peak) no prayers in this part.

Table 2: Prayer schedule for month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam-ul-moazzam*

Prayer name	Time	Place of worship for Men	Place of worship for Women
Fajr	05:22 am*	Nearby Mosque	Homes
Zawaal (Zohr & Asr)	12:33pm*	Nearby Mosque	Home
Maghrib & Isha	18:42 pm*	Nearby Mosque	Home
Nisf-ul-layl (an additional prayer only for the month of Ramadan-ul-Moazzam)	23:45pm*	Nearby Mosque	Nearby Mosque

*time varies depending on sunrise and sunset

2. Zawal to Sunset (Zohr and Asr).
3. Sunset to Midnight (Maghrib and Isha).

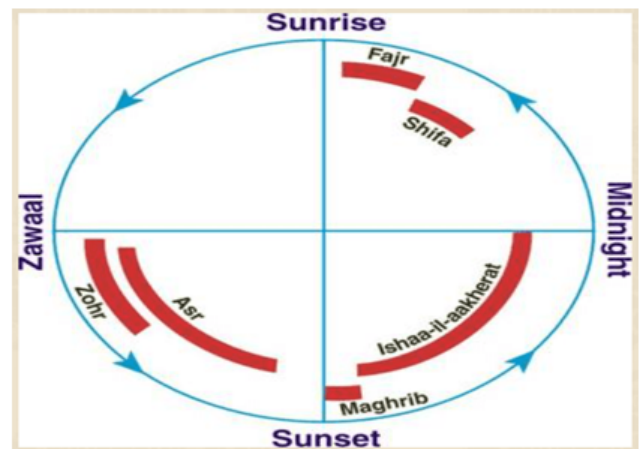


Fig. 2: Prayers during the day Source: <http://AlaviBohra.org/>

Sleep pattern during Ramadan-ul-Moazzam: During the *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* month, sleep pattern is affected. The following chart displays the diurnal activities. People sleep only for 2.5-3 hours at a stretch twice to thrice in a day i.e. before going and after coming back from midnight prayer of *nisf-ul-layl* (9:00pm to 11:30 pm) (1:30 am to 3am). Month of enlightening your life rather than extending it – *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*, considered as a month that washes away the dirt of evil, laziness, ignorance.

Charity during Ramadan: The obligatory charity to be given during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* is known as *zakaat-ul-fitr*. It is to be given by anyone who possesses a day's and night's worth of food. It consists of one meal unit of the most common staple food of the country, which can be rice, wheat or dates or raisins. It is to be given

24 HOUR ACTIVITY DISTRIBUTION DURING RAMADAN-UL-MOAZZAM

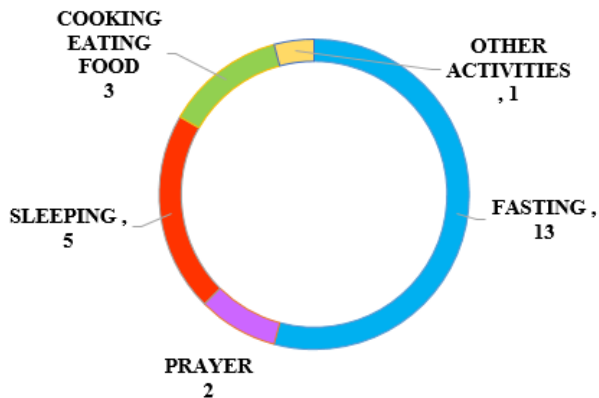


Fig. 3: Distribution of 24 hours in various activities during the day

to poor and needy Muslim so as to ensure that there is no person without food or hungry on the day of *Eid*. If it appears that giving money instead of staple food stuff will be more beneficial to the poor, it is permissible to pay the value of *zakaat-ul-fitr* in money of one meal unit, which is equivalent to approximately 3 kg of food stuff. A Muslim must pay *zakaat-ul-fitr* for himself and all the persons he is legally bound to support, such as his wife and children. It is recommended to pay it even on behalf of an unborn child. In case of *Alavi Bohra* Muslims, the *zakaat-ul-fitr* is given to the spiritual head –*Dai*.

Food Pattern during Ramadan-ul-Moazzam: The time table to be followed for the time of *Sehri* and *Iftaar* is accessed through the *Alavi Bohra* calendar. As *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* is a month of time restricted fasting for Muslims, the time of *Sehri* and *Iftaar* are followed.

Sehri / Suhoor / Sihori

Sehri is the pre-dawn meal usually consumed 90 minutes before *fajr* the first obligatory prayer during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*. Some of the most common items consumed in *Iftaar* are as follows:

1. Tea
2. Roti
3. Malai
4. Khichdi
5. Egg fry

After eating the *Sehri* meal, people make *niyyat* (intention) to fast by reciting the specific prayer. *Sehri* is followed by offering the obligatory *namaz of Fajr*.

Iftaar

Iftaar is the evening meal consumed during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*. The *Azaan* for *Maghrib* prayer at the sunset signals the time to break the day long fast.

Before beginning to eat the specific prayer is recited followed by their traditional practice – before starting any meal, a pinch of salt is tasted followed by dates, (*Khajoor*) is the first food eaten when the long day’s fast is broken during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*. As per the tradition three dates are consumed together, to follow the Prophet Muhammad who broke his fast with three dates. The date’s high sugar content makes it an ideal food for the body after hours of staying without any food or water, supplying the necessary rush of energy while being easy on the empty stomach. Seasonal fruits are also consumed daily and are also kept at the entrance of mosques for the fasting people.

Particular	Description	Picture
<i>Gol sharbat</i>	A lemonade made with jaggery and basil seeds and lemon juice	
Onion Gota's with Besan Kadhi	Deep fried onion bhajia with besan and curd kadhi	
<i>Faluda</i>	A milk based dessert with added semolina and basil seeds	
<i>Haleem</i>	Mix of broken wheat and pulses cooked with mutton	
<i>Dahi Wada</i>	<i>Urad</i> dal deep fried bhajia dipped in sweetened curd	
<i>Lookni Kela</i>	Banana eaten with besan/boondi dipped in sugar syrup	
<i>Tuver Dal Samosa</i>	Triangular shaped samosa - outer layer of refined wheat flour with stuffing of boiled and mashed tuver dal	
<i>Aaloo Bhajia</i>	Discs of potato dipped in a batter of besan and deep fried in oil	
<i>Chatpatti</i>	Boiled Chickpea served with chopped onions, boiled potatoes and tamarind chutney	
<i>Agar-agar milk jelly</i>	Layer of different colour milk jelly	

Fig. 4: Traditional sweet and savory dishes made/consumed for *Iftaar*

Alavi Bohra food has a regional influence of Gujarati cuisine, the delicacies prepared using ingredients easily available for example *dhokla* - a spongy fermented savory made with gram flour - is a famous Gujarati dish famous Gujarati dish is consumed for *Iftaar*, *tuver dal* (red gram dal) staple of Gujarat is incorporated in stuffing of *samosa*.

On *Eid*, Muslims are not allowed to fast, and are involved in a special prayer at *Eidgah* and visit family and friends. *Eid* is celebrated for three days.

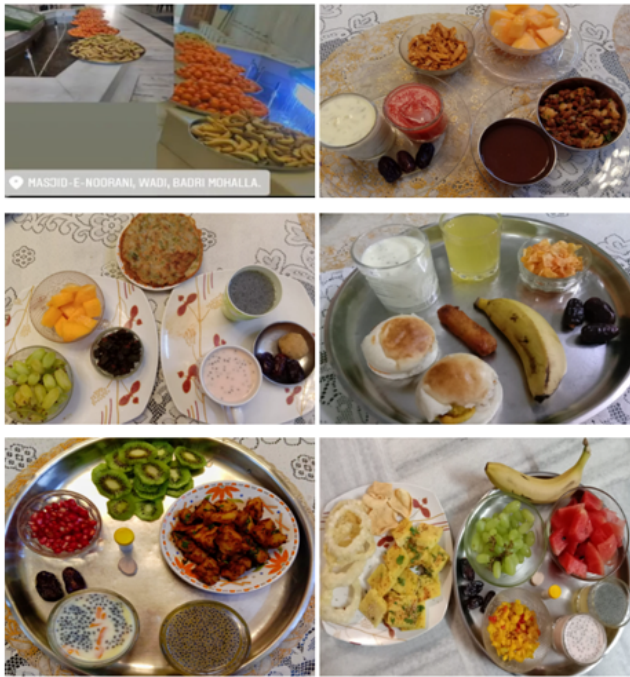


Fig. 5: In picture: Iftar spread

Eid-al-Fitra: It is a day of festivity and rejoicing. It is celebrated on the first day of the lunar month of *Shawwaal-ul-Mukarram*, marking the end of the month-long fasting. On *Eid-al-Fitra*, Muslims wear the best of clothes they have and consume a special delicacy known as *Sheer Khurma*. Children receive *Eiddi* (money) from elders and relatives. *Sheer Khurma* and other delicacies are exchanged with neighbours and relatives. *Alavi Bohras* had a community meal *Eid* at *Jamatkhana* a place where community people gather and eat food on various occasions. On 2nd May 2022 community meal of *Sheer Khurma*, Chicken fry and Paan (betel leaf) was served at *Jamatkhana of Noorani Masjid*.

Sheer Khurma is the most common traditional delicacy served on occasion of *Eid-al-Fitra*. Blanched and peeled almonds are used, as used by great grandmothers because of the unpleasant mouthfeel, colour and taste the almond peel may cause.

5. Discussion

The present study has highlighted that the *Alavi Bohra* community have a significant difference in the celebration of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*, which are seen in the customs followed during *namaz* (prayer pattern), *sehri* (pre-dawn meal) and *iftaar* (evening meal). Ever since their migration in India and settlement in Western India, which is a hub of several Muslim communities.

Ethnographic research helps researchers better understand a culture or society. There are some challenges to ethnographic research, such as time and communication

barriers. A researcher's interpretation of the data may be biased by their subject's culture or language barrier. Ethnography can also give researchers a more holistic view of how cultures function (Mathur, 2021).

In a prospective cohort study among schooling Ghanaian adolescents who fasted during Ramadan, fasting was characterized by marked changes in usual food patterns, increased dietary diversity and significant body weight loss (Ali & Abizari, 2018).

During Ramadan there is a basic ritual pattern in Jayagiri. People start the day at about three o'clock in the morning with the meal called *suhoor*, after which they are prohibited to eat or drink until sunset at about six o'clock, when the fast is broken (*buka puasa*). The local mosques offer opportunities to join in Ramadan prayers, and they also organize study groups for reading the Koran, but not everyone performs these religious duties. Some people attend the prayers, most perform at least part of the fasting month, but there is a wide variety in religious practice (Hellman, 2008).

Prayer in Islam is one of the pillars that a Muslim must perform five times a day. So, there are unlimited prayers the Muslim may perform, especially in Ramadan. However, in the fasting month, most Muslims perform more than five prayers and worship to increase the rewards (Saad, 2021).

"*Taraweeh*" the special prayer in Ramadan is performed after 8:00 pm for approximately one hour. Hence there is more physical exercise in this prayer, which causes tranquility & stress relaxation to the person performing it (Pathan & Patil, 2015).

This study suggests that Ramadan has a positive impact on the holistic health of Muslims. The *Iftaar* program played a role in improving the wellbeing of participants. The key findings of this study related to the improvement of spirituality, physical health and nutrition during Ramadan (Ibrahim, 2018).

Early in the morning it was time for the first *sehri* meal. *Imsak*, the moment when the fast starts, was scheduled for exactly 3:56 a.m., and family members assembled in the living room an hour before. The beginning of the first day of fasting was honored by serving variety of foods; there were rice, vegetables, chicken, meat, cakes, and tea. As the month progressed and the meal became routine, the food became simpler (Hellman, 2008).

Regarding the first food eaten to break the fast the food item varies from place to place and from sect-to-sect. Dates (*khajoor*) are preferred for breaking the fast considering not only their nutritional value but it is also considered to be a *Sunnah* (a practice that used to be followed by Prophet Muhammad PBUH). Some people eat plain dates, while others eat them with yoghurt or cheese, notably a handmade curd known as *yiggiti*. The date (*khajoor*) is a staple of the diet of Gulf Arabs, used in both savoury and sweet recipes. Date syrup is used to make the *jellab* drink, which is sold

Table 3: Sheer Khurma Recipe of Alavi Bohras and its approximate nutritional value

Sheer Khurma	
Ingredients	1 litre of Full Fat Milk, 100 g Sugar, 20-30 g <i>Sewaiyan</i> , 1 pinch kesar, 1 tsp cardamom Powder, 2 tbsp ghee, 100-150 g mix dry fruits - almonds, pistachio, cashews, dried coconut, poppy seeds, dried dates, <i>charoli</i> or <i>chironjee</i> and raisins
Method	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Blanch the almonds and remove the peel. Slice all almonds, pistachios, and cashews and keep aside. Mix these with grated coconut, <i>charoli</i> & poppy seeds. 2. Cut dried dates into pieces and pit them and soak raisins in water. 3. Keep the milk for boiling, add dried dates and <i>kesar</i> in it for flavor and colour, boil till dried dates become soft. 4. Add sugar into milk, stir and boil further. 5. In another heavy bottom vessel, heat ghee and add <i>sewaiyan</i> & roast it till it changes color. 6. Add dry fruits to it. And roast for 2-3 mins and keep stirring. Remove from flame. 7. After milk gets to boil, add the dry fruits & <i>sewaiyan</i> mixture to it. Keep boiling and stirring, to enhance the taste. 8. Add the soaked raisins towards an end to prevent curdling. 9. Serve <i>Sheer Khurma</i> warm or cold based on preference, in a bowl & enjoy with family on <i>Eid</i> & other happy occasions.
Cost	160-200 rupees per litre
Nutrients	Approximate values per serve (200ml bowl) Energy: 535 kCal; Protein: 11g; Fat: 20 g; Iron: 3.3 mg and Calcium: 350 mg

Table 4: Comparison -Ramadan-ul-Moazzam and Eid of Alavi Bohra and other sub-sects of Islam

Particular	Alavi Bohra	Other sub-sects
Beginning of the <i>Ramadan-ul-Moazzam</i> month	Based on the Misri Lunar Calendar	Based on sighting of moon
<i>Niyat</i> (Prayer of intention to fast)	<i>Allahumma inni navyayato an asooma saumal yaumul avvale min shahre ramzanul moazzam asab adan lillahe inshaallaho ta'ala</i>	<i>Allahumma asumu gadalaka fagfiri ma kaddantu wa ma akhartu*</i>
Dua (Prayer recited before <i>Iftaar</i>)	<i>Allahumma laka sumna wa bika Aamanna wa ala rizkika aftarna fata kabbal minna zahaba zamaaii wam talatil uruki wa bakiyal ajru inshaallahu ta'ala</i>	<i>Allahumma laka sumto wa bika aamantu wa ilayka tawakkaltu wa ala rizki ka aftartu*</i>
First food in <i>Iftaar</i>	Tasting a pinch of salt and / or <i>khak-e-shifa</i> (soil of Karbala battleground)	<i>Khajoor</i>
Prayer	<i>Nisf-ul-Layl</i>	<i>Taraweeh</i>
<i>Zakaat-ul-Fitra</i>	Given to Dai only	Given to poor and needy
Number of fasts	30	29 or 30 based on moon sighting
Eid	Based on the Misri Lunar Calendar	Based on sighting of moon
Place of worship for women	At mosque	At homes

*subject to vary

on the street with crushed ice and pine nuts and golden raisins as garnish. In the Levant, people break their fast with apricot leather juice, *fattoush* - a mixed herb and bread salad, and/or lentil soup. In Maghreb, soup is the first thing people eat after sunset, whereas in Indonesia they break their fast with *buka puasa*, sweet snacks and drinks known as *takjil* (Helou, 2018).

For *Alavi Bohra* desserts are called *mithaas* and the savoury dishes *kharaas*. *Gol sherbet*, a lemonade in which jaggery replaces sugar, and is garnished with *tukmuri* (basil) seeds and especially relished during *Ramadan*.

Sambusa stuffed with vegetables or meat are found across the Middle East and are a cousin of the South Asian samosa. In Yemen, they are a much-loved tradition. *Fatta*, meaning crushed or crumbs, is a sort of bread soup

made with pieces of the Yemeni bread bits mixed with meat broth and cooked vegetables making it soggy and mushy. *Fatta* can also be made as a dessert with sweet ingredients including dates and honey (Barrington, 2021).

Muslims practicing Islamic Intermittent Fasting enjoy various health benefits, including weight loss, reduced insulin resistance, blood glucose, and blood pressure, improved lipid profile, prevention of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer, protection against neurodegeneration, and diminished inflammation. Islamic Intermittent Fasting could also improve health span and extend life span (Pakkir et al., 2018).

Little is known with any certainty about the clinical problems during the fast of Ramadan. As perhaps 400 million people fast during Ramadan the topic deserves more

thorough scientific attention (Rashed, 1992).

Therefore, many more such ethnographic studies with a special emphasis on food culture needs documentation from regional and religion diaspora.

6. Conclusion

An anthropological approach to document the food culture of Alavi Bohra Muslims during the month of *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam* depicts distinctiveness with an influence of regional Gujarati cuisine. Traditional customs and practices are well-preserved in *Sehri* and *Iftaar* meal in terms of meal time, pattern and type as well as worshipping during *Ramadan-ul-Moazzam*.

7. Declarations

All the authors contributed to the idea and overall construction of this manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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10. Conflict of Interest

None.

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