

# Tracing The Roots Of The Ubiquitous Indian Snack—Samosa

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Photo Courtesy: Colonel Saab

**India's favourite snack, samosa, traces its roots across continents and still reigns supreme, thanks to its versatility and flavour. By Fareeda Kanga**

At a swish new Indian restaurant in London, Colonel Saab, where a canopy of chandeliers and sophisticated dishes like smoked lamb shanks grace the menu. Ironically, it is the humble samosa that has caught the attention of critics and diners alike.

Karen Anand, chef and consultant to [Colonel Saab](#), feels the Brits like samosas because they are a spicy version of the Cornish pastry!

Food critic Abigail Spooner, when asked about her favourite item on the menu, said, "Those samosas...crisp pastry on the outside and laced with spice on the inside. I'd happily eat a plateful."

Indeed as a nation, our views are *ad idem* with Spooner, for we consume an estimated 6 crore samosas in India on a daily basis which makes it safe to assume that it's India's most consumed and loved [snack](#).

## A GLOBAL BEGINNING

Surprisingly the samosa isn't endemic to our country. It was thought of to have originated in Persia around the 11th century AD, though it is likely that it might have come from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and [Turkmenistan](#) in Central Asia. Royal families of yore loved samosas as they were easy to eat at tea parties, and also to transport as snacks for *shikaars* (hunt). Although the outer casing or pastry has remained largely the same through the years all over the globe, the unusual fillings of the previous centuries boggle the mind! Historically, peoples of Central Asia often stuffed their samosas with things like spiced horse meat. An array of stuffings ranging from carrot, peas, jackfruit, gucchi mushroom were de rigueur.

Near forest, these snacks were stuffed with the game that was caught—first grilled with spices, then stuffed in the pastry. These samosas would be more rustic, almost resembling the ones found in Central Asia. The stuffing would range from wild boar, wild hare, venison, peacock, or even game birds.

"After all, what is a Samosa?" questions food critic, Kunal Vijaykar. He continues, "It is pastry or bread [that is] stuffed and deep-fried. It's a common food amongst many cultures. [This] puts the samosa straight in the families of the Portuguese Pastel, the Spanish Empanadas, Italian Calzone, or a Southeast Asian Curry Puff."

## THE GREAT INDIAN SAMOSA

As India's favourite snack, there are bound to be variants across states as diverse as our people. Besides the ubiquitous Punjabi samosa—with its thicker crust and potato filling—non-vegetarian communities like the Boris and Parsees specialise in Patti samosas—triangular cocktail-size morsels with a thinner crust and *keema* filling.

"As a chef, I personally feel that the samosa is super versatile. It can be the poor man's snack. In the other, it can have all the goodness of dry fruits, meats and *ghee* making it fit for a kings table," says [Home Chef](#) Anuradha Joshi Medhora of [Charoli Foods](#), a specialist in Malwa cuisine near Indore.

And it's not just fillings that have a geographical diversity; its shape also varies from place to place. The moon-shaped *nevrīs*, originally found in the palace kitchens of the Holkar's, are an example of a revival of an old recipe amongst home chefs nowadays.

"These were essentially samosas with the same dough and milder stuffings shaped like the *karanjis* found in western India," says Joshi Medhora.

Young entrepreneurs Amit Ananwani and Diksha Pande have tapped on the samosa's popularity and launched, Samosa Party—a company that offers freshly-made samosas to order in hygienic, tamper-proof packs.

"Today's consumer is a global citizen and works on different time zones. So why should fresh samosas only be available in the evening in the same old newspaper or paper bags? Our stores are available for delivery even when you're craving samosas at 3 am in the morning," Ananwani adds.

At the kitchens of [ITC Grand Central](#), Parel, Chef Paul Noronha likes to mix things up with his signature *samosa chaat*, a crushed samosa liberally dolloped with creamy yoghurt, date and tamarind chutneys, onions, tomatoes for an explosive flavour. A testament to the versatility of the samosa—all smashed up, but still delicious!

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