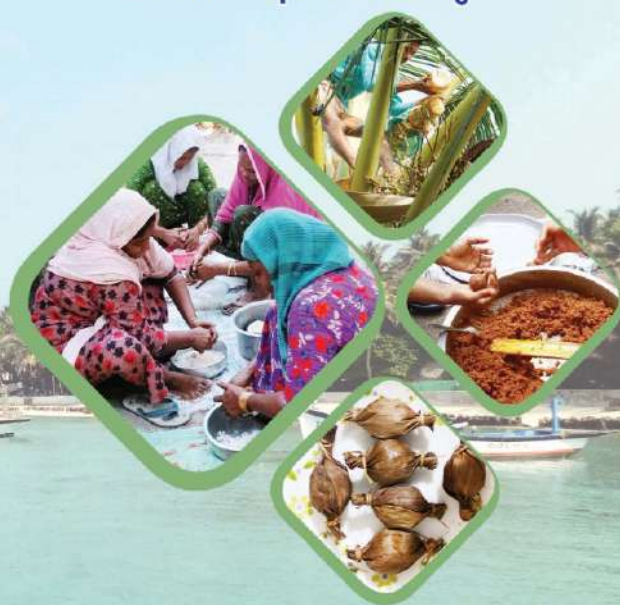


# Coconut Halwa

Lakshadweep's sweet delight



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### **Coconut- the life line of Lakshadweep**

“A land full of coconuts” is how Lakshadweep is described. The blend of alluring green coconut groves and serene turquoise lagoons add to the beauty of the islands. The socio-economic and cultural lives of the people of Lakshadweep are closely linked to coconut palm. Other than fishing, the main sources of income for the people are coconut farming and the production and sale of copra. Over the past few years, there has been a drastic decline in the coconut productivity in the islands. Coconut-based economy in the island can be revived only through diversified product development and value addition.

### **Status of value addition of coconut in Lakshadweep**

Value addition and marketing of coconut products from the islands is greatly hindered by logistics, and the monsoon, which runs from May to September. However, there are few enterprises on value addition and processing which are very traditional. After meeting domestic consumption needs, a surplus of 8 crore nuts is available for the food processing industry for value addition. It is reported that one-fourth of nuts produced in the islands are used for domestic consumption. Major share, nearly two-third, of coconuts produced is used for copra preparation. Tender nut consumption is very limited, about less than 5% of total production of nuts. Tender coconuts mostly utilized during the festival season (Ramzan). Limited quantity, about 2% of nuts is used for making coconut oil for domestic consumption. The prevailing fact is that there is significant potential for exporting value-added products from the islands. There are many indigenous value-added products produced on a small scale, and one such interesting and unique product is the coconut halwa of Lakshadweep.

### **Lakshadweep halwa (Coconut halwa)**

Lakshadweep halwa, also called “*aluva*” or “*dweep halwa*” or “*dweep unda*” in the local dialect is a traditional Lakshadweep culinary product made of grated coconut and concentrated neera, locally known as “*katti*”, wherein *katti* is prepared by heating neera (Coconut sap) into a semi-solid form, similar to jaggery. Concerning the word halwa’s origin, it comes from the Arabic word “Hulw,” which means sweet. It first appeared in English between 1840 and 1850. Food historians perceive that the Arabic text Kitab-Al-Tabikh (The Book of Dishes) from the 13th century has the earliest recorded mention of halwa. Different varieties of halwa and dishes have been reported in the book. It is extensively distributed throughout South Asia and the Middle East. Most types of halwa are dense confections sweetened with sugar or honey. Halwa was considered as an integral

part of the food in the two coastal cities “Karachi and Calicut” which had an Arabian influence. The same is true even today. *The famous Karachi Bakery in Hyderabad, India stands as testimony for that and Calicut, the city of varieties of halwa is well known.* To give an example, “Tirunelveli Halwa” became well-known in the 18th century when the Nawabs of Arcot, an area of Tamil Nadu, started to advertise it. “Nawabi halwa” was the name given to Tirunelveli Halwa, which is one of the most popular sweets in south India. These days, halwa is popular all over the world.

Halwa is generally made from different sources including refined wheat flour, semolina, green gram, chickpeas, carrots, etc. It is described as yellow-brownish, opaque, soft, and smooth in texture in North India (such as *carrot halwa*) whereas it is a translucent, lustrous, jelly-like substance in Southern India (such as *Kozhikodan halwa*). Generally, refined wheat flour is used as the major ingredient in halwa in addition to refined sugar and fat. India has a wide variety of halwa, unique to particular regions of the country. On the other hand, Lakshadweep halwa is unique from the popular varieties of halwas of India and south East Asia because of its choice of ingredients. Preparation and use of halwa has been known to the islanders since time immemorial. The knowledge and skill for halwa preparation has been handed over to generations and many of the women of present generation in Lakshadweep islands also actively follow the traditional methods of halwa preparation. Nowadays, people are incorporating additional ingredients into halwa, rather than just using traditional gratings and *katti*.

### **Traditional method of halwa preparation**

Grated coconuts and concentrated neera (*katti*) are the two exclusive ingredients used for making halwa. The product is unique since all of the ingredients are derived entirely from coconut. The maturity of the kernel is very critical which influence the quality of the final product. Lower fiber content in coconut kernel is desirable for halwa preparation, as it improves the consistency of the product. Hence, 9-10 months old coconuts are used for preparing halwa. The nuts are harvested by skilled climbers following traditional method. These days, coconut halwa is produced in Kerala and other neighboring states which are different from the halwa of Lakshadweep, but it is marketed in the name of Lakshadweep halwa. The uniqueness of Lakshadweep’s coconut halwa lies in its base ingredient, ‘*katti*’ (a concentrated neera sap similar to jaggery), which sets it apart from the palm jaggery commonly used in halwa preparation on the mainland. According to the survey conducted

in tandem by the KVK, Kavaratti, and Lakshadweep Development Corporation Limited (LDCL) to ascertain the roots of Lakshadweep halwa, the islanders have been preparing it for approximately 80–100 years.

Usually, the quantity of halwa prepared and frequency of preparation depend on demand from the local community. Women of the neighborhood prepare the halwa as a community activity. In every island, women groups are actively involved in the preparation and marketing of halwa. In islands like Agatti, where there are more visitors from the mainland, some women groups are continuously involved in the preparation and marketing of halwa. On such islands, there are numerous self help groups engaged in income-generating activities related to halwa production. Furthermore, in islands like Agatti the availability of *katti* is comparatively high due to the larger number of tappers. In the past, Department of Agriculture was implementing a scheme for promoting neera tapping in the islands. As part of the scheme, neera tappers were engaged by Village Dweep Panchayath and the Department used to pay them the wages. Neera thus collected was sold to the public which was either converted to *kattior* fermented for making coconut vinegar. However, the availability of neera is on the decline as the scheme for neera tapping by the Department was discontinued since 2021.

*Katti* is made by concentrating freshly extracted neera (locally called *meera*) in an open pan (locally known as *Kaychemb*) using dried coconut residues such as spathe, rachelle, petiole, pedicel etc as fuel. During the initial heating, much fuel will be used to bring the *meera* to boiling stage, thereafter, once it starts thickening, heat will be reduced by removing some of the fuel material, continuing the concentrating process until it reaches a semi solid form. Since, the pH of *meera* extracted from the islands is slightly acidic or partially fermented (pH below 6.8), further crystallization does not happen and *katti* (semi solid form of concentrate or spread) is the end product. There is a traditional practice of adding coral stone (calcium carbonate) during the boiling of *meera* to adjust the acidity level. The *katti* thus obtained is packaged in glass or plastic bottles and stored for further use. Women groups generally purchase from the tappers and entrepreneurs who make *katti*. Once the *katti* is ready, the next step in the preparation of halwa is grating of the kernel, which is done manually using traditional graters. In a group, 3-4 women sit together for grating the kernels. The women's group prepares halwa in the backyard of one of the members' homes. They schedule the preparation at convenient times, ensuring it does not interfere with their regular household routines.

The semi-solid *katti* is first diluted by adding it to heated water. The required amount of water is heated in a pan, and the *katti* is gradually added to the water to achieve the desired dilution. Instead of water, coconut water obtained while splitting the nuts is also for halwa preparation by some of the women groups. They believe that use of coconut water enhances the taste of halwa. The diluted *katti* (locally known as *katti thanni*) will be further concentrated until it reaches one-string consistency. The gratings are added once the liquid reaches one string in consistency and are mixed well to get the kernel uniformly coated with the liquid *katti*. The ratio of coconut gratings, coconut water and *katti* is about 1.5: 1.5: 0.5 respectively. Fresh coconut petiole is shaped and used as ladle for stirring the concentrate. The rationale for using the coconut petiole ladle is the belief that the stirring of the mix would be easier especially at the finishing stage of halwa making, when the mix would come closer to the petiole. The whole process is carried out under low flame. The process is stopped when the grating adheres to the ladle without sticking to the vessel. By the end of the process, the greenish petiole turns to brownish in colour. The halwa thus made will be made into ball shape when it is still hot and packaged with dried banana leaves. The two tips of the packet will be tied with banana leaf fibre. Halwa yield obtained will be about 40% of the total quantity of ingredients used. One packaged halwa will weigh approximately 35-40 g.

During the survey conducted by KVK Lakshadweep, it was observed that some women groups are adding refined wheat flour or rice flour at the end of heating to give it a little more firmness and ease of shaping. When there is not enough *katti*, many people are even adding refined sugar along with *katti*. Such interventions in the preparation of halwa affect its genuine and authentic taste.

### Shelf life

Systematic studies on the shelf life of Lakshadweep halwa are scanty. However, its long shelf stability is evident from the experiences of the islanders. The reminiscences of elderly people of the islands reveal that halwa was prepared in large quantity for the Haj Pilgrims during olden days when it was long travel days in Indian-style boom boats (*odam or paykappal*), which take 45–60 days to Mecca and to return to the islands, and the leftover halwa packaged in dried banana leaves brought back by the pilgrims tasted as fresh as the newly prepared halwa.





**Vessel and laddle used for preparing halwa**



**Melting *katti* in coconut water**



**Dissolving *katti* in coconut water**



**Addition of coconut gratings with continuous stirring**





**Concentrating**



**Final stage when the mix comes out easily from the pan and sticking near to the laddle**



**Freshly made halwa before packaging**



**Halwa packaged with dried banana leaf**

In earlier days, sailors embarking on fishing trips or journeys to the mainland, which could take nearly a month, relied on coconut halwa as a staple food due to its long shelf life. During the baseline survey, an 80-year-old woman mentioned that coconut halwa was essential for sailors because of its durability.

### **Constraints and opportunities**

Presently the halwa is prepared manually which involves lot of drudgery for the women folk. Grating of coconut, *katti* preparation, and constant stirring of the ingredients are all necessary steps in the lengthy process of making halwa. Three kg of raw materials might be processed in 2-2.5 hours. In addition, while making halwa, the workers must tolerate the pan's high temperature. Therefore, to reduce the labour, it would be quite advantageous to automate the procedure by using an open pan kettle with electrical stirrers, like to a VCO cooker or khoa kettle. Making halwa balls is also a laborious task that must be done while the halwa is still hot. Using appropriate moulding tools can make the process easier. Halwa is a unique value added product of coconut with high nutritional value exclusive to Lakshadweep islands with vast potential to become a Lakshadweep GI (Geographical indication) product. Though it has a great potential for marketing, the cost of halwa is higher due to the high cost of the *katti* (presently *Katti* costs about Rs. 800-1000 per kg). As a result, a wide variety of comparable items with a suggested retail price of Rs. 5 per piece are available in the mainland market that is prepared using jaggery or refined sugar. In the mainland such items are sold as Lakshadweep halwa or island halwa which actually lack the unique quality of the original product. As a result, it is getting difficult to market the original Lakshadweep product which has to be sold at the rate of Rs. 35 to 50 per halwa piece to make it remunerative. Hence, it is imperative that some meaningful interventions are implemented to exploit the market potential of Lakshadweep halwa by the concerned agencies. Once it receives the GI tag, the potential of production and marketing (domestic as well as international) of Lakshadweep halwa can be better exploited which would enhance the income and employment opportunities of the islanders.

In this context, LDCL established a committee for the purpose of obtaining GI tag for the coconut halwa in Lakshadweep and, under the direction of KVK, carried out a baseline survey for GI of coconut halwa in the Agatti and Kavaratti islands. Lakshadweep coconut halwa has a high demand in internally and in main land. The halwa with standard packaging and GI tagging would help in increasing its value in main land.

The ingredient and cost of production in detail of coconut halwa, collected during the survey are as follow:

S.No	Ingredient	Quantity	Unit price (Rs)	Price (Rs)
1.	<i>Katti</i>	1 kg	1000	1000
2.	Tender coconut	20 nos	20	400
	Total			1400

Cost of production (Rs)	Gross income(Rs) (50 nos@Rs.50)	Net income (Rs)
1400	2500	1100

One kg *katti* costs around Rs.1000. To make 50 coconut halwa, we need to use one kg of coconut jaggery and 20 tender coconuts, which costs about Rs. 1400 to make 50 coconut halwa. One halwa costs around Rs 50 and the gross income from 50 halwa is Rs 2500. Accordingly, the profit after reducing the cost of production would be Rs. 1100.

### **Present Status of Coconut halwa in Lakshadweep Islands**

The halwa produced in the island is wholly from *katti* which costs more than the palm sugar. The jaggery produced are from the coconuts which are default organic from the island. In every island, women groups are actively involved in preparation and marketing of halwa. Women of the neighborhood prepare the halwa as a community activity and market to the tourist homes/resorts. The coconut halwa is not commercially available in the island. It is a practice that orders are given to the small scale producers by the tourist homes/resorts to sell coconut halwa. Professional way of marketing and a proper channel is not in place for this unique value added product. Key informants from Agatti Island perceive that the quality of coconut halwa produced in the present day do not match with the earlier days. The reason being the price of neera and *katti* extracted. The market price of palm jaggery costs Rs. 150/kg but the *katti* prepared from neera costs Rs.800-1000 and also the availability is very low Hence, many of them produce halwa using the palm jaggery.

### **Future prospects**

The baseline survey indicated that the coconut halwa produced in the islands qualifies for GI tagging, which will benefit small-scale producers and self-help groups across the islands. The superior quality of the coconut halwa is attributed to the use of *katti*, the key ingredient, unlike the palm jaggery or palm sugar used on the mainland. Moreover, the low glycaemic index of *katti* (concentrated neera) would add more value to the product, which would help in fetching a better market. Therefore, this low-volume, high-end product, ‘coconut halwa,’ should be introduced to the market through advanced marketing channels targeting both domestic and international markets, thereby enhancing income and employment opportunities for the islanders.



