

Gorakhpur's undiscovered mango

A writer remembers growing up with a lesser-known but unforgettable variety of the fruit synonymous with Indian summers

Shirin Mehrotra

Aamon ki dohi khasiyat honi chahiye, ki wo meethe hon aur khoob hon (mangoes should have only two qualities, that they are sweet and plentiful).

I couldn't agree more with Ghalib when it comes to mangoes. Growing up on my grandfather's farm in northern Uttar Pradesh, both the requirements were met on a regular basis. Dussehri, Langra, Chausa, Safeda were a daily feature on the dining table during summer vacations.

However, there was one variety that always stayed a step ahead of us: the Gaurjeet of Gorakhpur. The mango would ripen mid-May and was only available till mid-June. So travelling away from Gorakhpur—a city where I was born, grew up and spent a considerable number of years—meant missing out on it.

Gaurjeet is smaller than Alphonso, has



The Gaurjeet variety of Gorakhpur has a short shelf life.

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golden-yellow skin and bright golden-orange flesh. It's one of the most fragrant varieties, and the fruit is almost always sweet; so much so that it was known as *mithana* (originating from the word *meetha*, which means sweet in Hindi) in Ghazipur. "As per legend, Gaurjeet was first grown in Bettiah in Bihar, from where it travelled to Gorakhpur," says Hasan Masud, a lawyer by profession, who comes from one of the oldest *zamindar* families

of Gorakhpur and grows Gaurjeet in his home garden. "It was brought to Maharajganj and the soil of the region suited the mango," he says, adding that Gaurjeet and *gaurjeet* (as it's called in villages) are colloquial versions of what was originally *gauharjeet* (*gauhar* means pearl in Urdu).

Not many outside the Gorakhpur-Deoria-Basti belt know of this mango, which has a short shelf life, and is usually consumed locally. A partially ripened Gaur-

jeet mango wouldn't survive for more than two-three days. Once I moved to Mumbai, Gaurjeet was one of the few things I missed terribly. However, despite the difficulty of transportation, my father would send a box by train for my sisters and me every year. And just to ensure not a single mango was wasted, our meals would largely consist of mangoes for the next few days.

Try to look it up online and there's hardly any information available on this elusive variety. After speaking to R.P. Chaurasiya, a senior official in the horticulture department of Gorakhpur, I learnt that there wasn't much information available in government records either. Chaurasiya mentions that a 15- to 20-year-old tree bears 150-200kg fruit in a year and almost all of it is used for local consumption. Nothing is exported because there's no supply chain, and the window between the plucking of the unripe fruit and its ripening is too short. The good news is that the yield has increased by 15-20% in the past 10-15 years thanks to the farmers being more aware, says Chaurasiya.

Whether Gaurjeet finds itself on the country's mango map or not, it certainly holds a special place for those who've grown up in and around Gorakhpur. For, it's the first mango in the market, the harbinger of the mango season.

✉ lounge@livemint.com