

KHAJA IS CRISPY AND LAYERED SWEET DISH FROM EASTERN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Khaja is a traditional, crispy, and layered sweet, often soaked in sugar syrup, hailing from Bihar and Odisha, India. Made from refined flour, ghee, and water, it is rolled, layered, fried until golden, and often enjoyed during festivals or as a popular snack in cities like Puri. Khaja is an Indian dessert believed to have originated from the Bihar and is also popular in the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha as well as Andhra Pradesh. Khaja is an Indian dessert believed to have originated from the Bihar and is also popular in the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha as well as Andhra Pradesh.

KEYWORDS: khaja, sugar, ghee, flour.

HISTORY

Khaja is an ancient deep-fried, sugar-syrup-soaked pastry originating over 2,000 years ago in the Magadh region (modern-day Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh), with deep roots in Odisha's Jagannath Puri. It is a layered, crunchy dessert made from refined wheat flour, ghee, and sugar, often associated with Buddhist, Mauryan, and temple traditions.



Figure-1: Silao khaja, Puri khaja & Kakinada khaja.

Khaja's Origin

- **Ancient Roots:** Believed to date back to the Mauryan Empire, some legends suggest it was offered to Gautam Buddha while he was travelling between Rajgir and Nalanda.
- **Silao, Bihar:** The town of Silao in the Nalanda district is considered a primary birthplace, where the technique of creating its distinct flaky layers was perfected.
- **Jagannath Puri, Odisha:** A staple, traditional offering (Mahaprasad) at the Jagannath Temple, where it has been prepared for centuries.

Regional Variations

- **Silao Khaja (Bihar):** Known for being light, puffy, and porous.
- **Odisha Khaja:** Crunchy, layered, and soaked in sugar syrup.
- **Kakinada/Tapeswaram Khaja (Andhra Pradesh):** Often drier on the outside with a syrup-filled centre.

Ingredients: Prepared by layering wheat flour dough, frying it in ghee or oil until crisp, and then soaking it in sugar syrup.

It is highly popular during festivals and is considered a symbol of regional, cultural, and religious heritage in both Bihar and Odisha.

- **Texture:** Flaky, crunchy, and light, with distinct layers.
- **Ingredients:** Refined flour (maida), ghee (or oil), sugar, and optional cardamom for flavouring.
- **Process:** The dough is rolled into thin sheets, layered with a paste (ghee and rice/flour), rolled into a cylinder, sliced, flattened, and deep-fried to golden colour [Maillard Reaction].
- **Finishing:** Fried pieces are immersed in a sugar syrup (typically 1-string consistency) for a few minutes.
- **Varieties:** Can be square, round like a poori, or spindle-shaped.
- **Cultural Significance:** Famous as "Silao Khaja" from Bihar (near Rajgir/Nalanda) and a staple in Puri, Odisha, where it is offered as mahaprasad.
- **Storage:** Khaja has a long shelf life and can be stored for weeks.

Made with ingredients like wheat **flour, sugar, maida, ghee, cardamom, and aniseeds**, it offers a delightful combination of flavours and textures. The Silao Khaja is a testament to the region's rich culinary heritage and traditional craftsmanship. Khaja is famous for its unique flaky, crispy texture from layered dough, its deep cultural ties as a sacred offering (Mahaprasad) at Odisha's Jagannath Temple and Bihar's Chhath Puja, its ancient origins (linked to Lord Buddha/Mahavir in Bihar), and its versatility, being a convenient, long-lasting dry sweet for travellers. It's celebrated globally, earning recognition as a top pastry, thanks to its distinct taste and spiritual significance in both Odia and Bihari traditions. Khaja is famously associated with Puri, Odisha, where it's a key prasad (holy offering) at the Jagannath Temple, known for its unique flaky texture and being a convenient sweet for devotees to carry home. It's also very popular in other regions, with famous versions in Silao, Bihar (Silao Khaja) and Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh (Madatha Kaja), each with distinct styles. Silao Khaja is a famous, crispy, and layered sweet delicacy originating from Silao in the Nalanda district of Bihar, India. **Made from wheat flour, sugar, and ghee, it features 12 to 16 thin, flaky layers that melt in the mouth, often scented with cardamom.** Silao is a city and a notified area in Nalanda district in the Indian state of Bihar. It is known for the excellent Khaja made by its Halwais. Known for its delicate, flaky layers, often compared to baklava.



Figure-2: Bihar, Odisha & Kakinada.

Key Details about Silao Khaja

- **Origin:** Silao, Nalanda district, Bihar, located on the highway between Rajgir and Nalanda.
- **Texture & Taste:** It is known for being extremely crispy, light, and airy, with a sweet, crunchy, and flaky texture.
- **Ingredients:** Prepared using refined flour (maida) or wheat flour, ghee (clarified butter), sugar, cardamom, and sometimes aniseeds.
- **Production:** The dough is skilfully rolled into thin layers, stacked, cut, and deep-fried in ghee before being soaked in sugar syrup.
- **History:** It is believed to date back to the time of King Vikramaditya, and according to legend, it was offered to Lord Buddha when he travelled from Rajgir to Nalanda.
- **Varieties:** While primarily a sweet, it is available in both sweet and salted varieties.
- **Cultural Significance:** It is a staple during festivals like Dussehra, Diwali, and Chhath Puja in Bihar.

It is highly popular among tourists and is considered a signature food item of Bihar, often produced just-in-time in local shops. Silao ka Khaja is a traditional Bihari delicacy known for its crispiness and delightful flavor. Besides being a local favourite, its taste is cherished by national and international tourists alike. The most famous khaja in Bihar is Silao Khaja, a layered, flaky, syrup-soaked sweet from the Nalanda district. It is celebrated for its crisp texture and melt-in-your-mouth quality, often made with wheat flour, ghee, and sugar syrup.

Puri Khaja is a famous, crispy, and layered sweet dish from Odisha, served as a sacred offering (Prasad) at the Jagannath Temple in Puri. Made by deep-frying layered dough made of refined wheat flour (maida) and ghee, it is soaked in sugar syrup. It is a flaky, crunchy delicacy often associated with Lord Jagannath. Puri Khaja is a famous, crispy, and layered sweet dish from Odisha, served as a sacred offering (Prasad) at the Jagannath Temple in Puri. Made by deep-frying layered dough made of refined wheat flour (maida) and ghee, it is soaked in sugar syrup. It is a flaky, crunchy delicacy often associated with Lord Jagannath.

Key Ingredients: Refined wheat flour (maida), sugar, and ghee (or oil).

- **Preparation:** Dough is rolled, layered, cut into shapes, and deep-fried until crisp, then soaked in sugar syrup.
- **Cultural Significance:** It is a traditional sweet, especially popular during Rath Yatra, and is a daily offering at the Puri Jagannath temple.
- **Texture:** It is known for its flaky, crackling, and crunchy texture.
- **Storage:** Best kept in airtight containers to maintain crispness.

Puri's Khaja

- **Origin:** Believed to have originated in Puri, Odisha.
- **Significance:** A vital part of the Mahaprasad offered to Lord Jagannath.
- **Characteristics:** Layered dough fried and coated in sugar syrup, often made with refined flour.
- **Other Famous Varieties:**

Madatha Kaja (Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh): Soft, syrup-soaked, and irresistible.

So, while Puri is strongly linked to Khaja as a sacred sweet, different cities across India offer their own beloved variations.

Silao Khaja, a multi-layered crispy sweet from Bihar, is made by creating a dough of refined flour (maida), ghee, and water, which is thinly rolled, layered with ghee, folded multiple times, and deep-fried in ghee or oil until golden. Finally, the crispy pastries are soaked in a sugar syrup.

Key Preparation Steps:

- **Dough Preparation:** Mix refined wheat flour (maida) with ghee to achieve a breadcrumb-like texture, then knead into a firm, smooth dough using water.
- **Layering Technique:** Roll the dough into thin sheets, apply ghee, and sprinkle a little flour to create layers. Roll this into a cylinder, cut into smaller portions, flatten them, and repeat the folding/rolling process to create numerous flaky layers.
- **Frying:** Deep-fry the layered pieces on low-to-medium heat to ensure they are cooked through and crispy without burning.
- **Sugar Coating:** Prepare a one-string consistency sugar syrup, often flavoured with cardamom or saffron, and dip the fried khaja into it until well coated.

The traditional, authentic method, which originated near Rajgir, is known to create up to 52 distinct layers, resulting in a light, crispy, and sweet delight. Khaja is a famous, crispy Indian sweet, particularly known as a traditional treat in Odisha and Bihar, because of its unique preparation technique that creates multiple layers of flaky dough.

The crispiness comes from several key factors:

Layering Technique

The dough, typically made from refined wheat flour (maida), is rolled out thin, layered with ghee and flour paste, rolled into a log, and cut into pieces. This creates distinct layers that separate upon frying.

Ghee/Shortening Content

Adding ghee (clarified butter) to the dough before kneading helps create a flaky, crisp texture.

Low-Temperature Frying

Khaja is deep-fried on low-to-medium heat. This allows the heat to penetrate all the layers, ensuring they are thoroughly cooked and crispy, not just browned on the outside.

Dry Exterior

While soaked in sugar syrup, the classic, traditional Khaja is often fried until it is quite dry on the outside, which ensures maximum crispness, while the inside remains flaky and, in some variations, slightly sugary.

Proper Cooling

Allowing the fried khaja to cool down completely before storing it in an airtight container is crucial to maintaining its crispness. The result is a pastry that is light, flaky, and crunchy.

CONCLUSION

Khaja is an iconic, deeply fried Indian sweet, renowned for its golden, crispy, and layered texture, often coated in sugar syrup. Hailing from Bihar (especially Silao) and a staple in Odisha (especially as Jagannath Temple Mahaprasad), this flaky treat is made from refined wheat flour and ghee. It is a beloved, traditional delicacy for festivals.

- **Texture & Taste:** It is known for being crispy on the outside and, when properly soaked, slightly soft and juicy on the inside, offering a delicate, layered crunch.
- **Origin & Significance:** It has ancient roots in Bihar (notably Silao) and is a significant offering at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha.
- **Ingredients:** Primarily made with maida (refined wheat flour), ghee (clarified butter), and sugar.
- **Preparation:** Layers of dough are created, rolled, cut, and deep-fried until golden, then dipped in cardamom-flavoured sugar syrup.
- **Varieties:** While often sweet, some variations can be found, but the classic version is a sugary, layered pastry.

REFERENCES

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khaja>