



SHOBA NARAYAN

## DEHLI JOURNAL (PART I): FRIED IS FINE

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I am not sure that I would eat the food in Chandni Chowk, but I know Americans who have and survived. They follow the rule: If it is fried, it is fine. The shops are tiny, but they offer all kinds of small delights. There is fresh paneer that will make its way to the city's top hotels by noon. There are countless dry-fruit stalls selling mounds of almonds, pistachios, walnuts, figs, and dates. Delhi homes serve these on winter afternoons, salted and fried in a little *ghee* as an accompaniment to piping hot tea. There are *chikkis* (peanut brittles), made by crushing and stirring peanuts in caramelized sugar. My husband is addicted to these, so I bought a bag. There are shops boiling milk in large vats till it reduces to almost a quarter its

volume. This condensed milk is the stuff of Indian *kheers* (hot milk puddings). There was an old man frying *puri* (shown here), which truck drivers gulp down with hot potato *saag* and glasses of freshly churned *lassi* (buttermilk). Even if you don't eat a bite, you'll be happy to spend hours just roaming around Chandni Chowk, taking in the sights and sounds and wonderful smells. I wouldn't miss it.

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