

TRADITIONAL CUISINES OF INDIA

An ITRHD Publication

May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, milk, sap, ghee, honey, eating and drinking at the common table, ploughing, rains, conquest, victory, wealth, riches. May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, low-grade food, freedom from hunger, rice, barley sesame, kidney beans, vetches, wheat, lentils, millets, panicum grains and wild rice. May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, trees, plants, which grows in ploughed land and which grows in unploughed land.

- Sanjeev Kapur



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Explore Rural India

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Editorial

Text will come h

Best wishes,

Sangya Chaudhary

Editor and Project Coordinator

The Indian Trust for Rural Heritage and Development (ITRHD)

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Food in Vedic Times Sanjeev Kapur | 7 |
| Festivals and Feast of India Salma Hussain | 10 |
| Kashmir Cuisine - A Treasure Trove Saleem Beg | 20 |
| Some Pathare Prabhu Recepies Chitkala Kirtikar | 25 |
| The Big, Fat Gujju Thali! Sandhya Bordewekar Gajjar | 32 |
| Sadya - The Kerala Feast for Body, Mind & Spirit Chef Narayanankutty, Kalari Rasayana, Kollam | 39 |
| Saraswat Cuisine Tara. N. Chandarvarkar | 42 |
| The Allure of Rich Punjabi Cuisine Davinder Kumar | 47 |
| Hyderabadi Cuisine Salma Hussain | 50 |
| Mapillah Cuisine Faiza Moosa | 54 |
| Bhojohori Manna- The Saga of Rural Cuisine Siddhartha Chatterjee | 57 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Bihari Cuisine Deepak Gupta | 61 |
| Where Food is Loved and Shared - Punjabi Cuisine Geetika Kalha | 66 |
| Traditional Cuisines of Tamil Nadu M.G. Devasahayam, HART Ambassador, Tamil Nadu | 71 |
| Heritage Cuisine Utensils and Styles of Cooking Anil Bhandari | 78 |
| A Brief Glimpse of the Mathur's and their Cuisine Preeta Mathur | 84 |
| Indian Pickles and Palate Rattan Capoor | 90 |
| The Cuisine of Malwa Pallavi Mishra | 93 |
| Maratha Cuisine goes Green at Deo Bagh, Gwalior Uma Jadhav | 98 |
| Sikkimese Cuisine A Melting Pot of Different Influences Jashoda Chettri | 102 |
| Food for the Soul Arun Budhiraja | 104 |
| The Gastronomical Trail of the Tribal North East India Ashish Chopra | 107 |
| Khata Meetha - A Descriptive Account of Parsi Food Shernaz Cama & Vanshika Singh | 116 |
| Rajasthani Cuisine Gayatri Singh | 125 |

Food in Vedic Times

Sanjeev Kapur

What did ancient India eat?

A prayer from the Yajurveda:

“May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, milk, sap, ghee, honey, eating and drinking at the common table, ploughing, rains, conquest, victory, wealth, riches. May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, low-grade food, freedom from hunger, rice, barley sesame, kidney beans, vetches, wheat, lentils, millets, panicum grains and wild rice. May for me prosper, through the sacrifice, trees, plants, which grows in ploughed land and which grows in unploughed land.”

This prayer, composed around 800 BC, gives us a pretty good indication of the food of that period. It is quoted from the eminent food historian K.T. Achaya's book on Indian food. K.T. Achaya's books on the history of Indian food are nothing less than a treasure house. He gives us a rare glimpse into the history and development of Indian cuisine.

Food

It is believed, that the Aryans set the agricultural patterns of food production that still prevails in India. The cultivation of rice, pulses, beans, peas, wheat, linseed and even hemp is mentioned in the Yajurveda, but the Rig Veda does not mention rice or wheat, only barley (yava). Thus making barley one of the earliest grains known to India.

One is curious to know about the food eaten by the Aryans. Deductions about the food of the Harappans are made from the archaeological artifacts but there is however, little or no evidence of their cooking habits. On

the other hand, there are listed evidences of food eaten by the Aryans, in the Rig Veda and other books. Barley was fried in ghee and fashioned into cakes or fried and then dipped in honey. Bengali sweets could trace its lineage to this technique. Rice came in later, but went on to dominate the food scene. Common accompaniments with rice were ghee, curds, pulses or meat. Wheat though not mentioned in the Rig Vedas, finds a mention in the Yajurveda and the Brahmans.

Amongst pulses the three prominent ones were urad, mung and masur. Rajma too makes an appearance and meat was commonly eaten. Ox, goats, birds; buffalo, humped bull and sheep were slaughtered for food. Animals were killed at ritualistic sacrifices and the meat would then be eaten. Dogs, village cock, boar and carnivorous animals were considered diet taboos. The taboo was relented only for times of distress. However, it should be noted that meat eating was encouraged only when there were guests or as offering to the gods.

Barley is one of the oldest grains. Rice came in much later, but it quickly found a place of prominence. Meat eating was common, but killing of animals other than for eating or religious sacrifices, was not encouraged.

Spices and Condiments

Salt was not common in the early Vedic times. Not only was it a rarity but also students and widows were not permitted to consume it. Newly weds had to abstain from salt for the first three days after their marriage. Salt was obtained from lakes, rivers, sea, swamps and mines,

and was expensive. The earliest spice was mustard, sour citrus, turmeric and long pepper. Later came in pepper and asafoetida. The spice list isn't too exhaustive, as the Aryans did not favour the use of spices.

One of the words for black pepper was kari. It was a vital ingredient in meat dishes; over the centuries kari got Anglicized and became curry, applying to wide range of seasoned dishes.

Fruits and vegetables

Fruits were an integral part of the Aryan diet. Three varieties of jujubes, udumbura fruit (Indian fig) and Saphaka (trapabispinosa) were commonly eaten, so was the rose apple and mango. Radish and ginger were munched on after meals to help in digestion. As it is in some communities even today garlic, onion and leek were looked down upon. The Rig Veda mentions the lotus stem, cucumber and later lotus roots, bottle gourd, singhada, aquatic plants, bitter gourd, a variety of methi for flavouring, mahua flowers, yam and other roots. Spinach, leafy vegetables, elephant yam (suran) and sweet potato are also mentioned. Grapes, forest fruits like berries are recorded and the newer fruits mentioned are jackfruits, banana, palm, tenduka and several species of citrus fruits.

Banks of rivers beaten by foam was where pumpkins and gourds were cultivated. Areas that were frequently flooded were used to grow grapes, long pepper and sugarcane.

Sweets and Desserts

The earliest sweetener was honey. A common welcome drink of those days was madhuparka, a honey sweetened concoction of curd and ghee. Later jaggery and sugar dominated as sweetening agents. Rock sugar was common and jaggery became the base for many sweet preparations. Many of the sweets made in those times exist even now,

slightly or not modified. In preparations related to dairy products there is a mention of payasya (not payasa), which was the solid part of curd mixed with boiled milk, crystal sugar and herbs. Shirkarini, the ancestor of present day shrikhand was made out of strained curd, crystal sugar and spices.

Interestingly the Rig Veda cites honey from smaller bees better than the one from bigger bees.

Beverages

Milk was one of the main ingredients in the cuisines of the Vedic period. Though cow's milk was preferred, buffalo and goat milk was also used. Grains were cooked in milk to prepare dishes. Other by products of milk like cream and ghee were also used extensively. Curd was very popular and the churning method was used to derive butter. Two varieties of cheeses, porous and non-porous find a mention in the texts. Adults consumed solidified and clarified butter while children ate fresh butter.

A popular dairy oriented drink was the rasala, a sweet and spicy curd. Speaking of drinks, one cannot have a chapter on food of the Vedic period without a mention of Som rasa or Soma. It was an exhilarating drink, which was called hoama in Iran and Soma in India. Soma was usually offered to the gods and consumed by priests during sacrifices. It was believed that an individual who consumed Soma was fortified beyond his natural abilities.

The process of extracting the Soma juice was an elaborate one. The Soma plant was sprinkled with water and ground with a stone on other stones placed above holes that were connected underground, the grinding then yielded a sound that was similar to bellowing bulls! The ground paste was collected on a cowhide and strained through a sheep's wool cloth; the sparkling liquid that was obtained

was mixed with milk, curd or flour and consumed. However there are no clear leads on what exactly was the Soma plant. While drinking Soma was commended, Sura was condemned. Sura, was an intoxicating liquor made from fermented barley or wild paddy and was consumed more by the Kshatriyas, but there were kings like Asvapati, who proudly declared that there were no drunkards in his kingdom. Parisruta was prepared from flowers or by fermenting certain grasses and Kilala was a sweet drink made of cereals. Masara, another drink was made of rice and spices, allowed to ferment for three days. Water was rightly called amrta or nectar.

The Aryans consumed fruit juices from a very early stage. Juice of the mango, jamun, banana, grapes, coconut and edible water lily were common.

According to the Sutras, hospitality is one of the five duties of the householder. Eating before offering to the gods, brahmans and guests was considered improper. Sacrificial priests, father-in-law and a king were considered specially deserving of hospitality, but one couldn't disregard even a sudra or a lower born as a guest. Besides these, the smaller creatures were also fed. Purity of food and cleanliness while preparing food was much stressed upon. Food prepared overnight or that, which had gone sour, was considered unfit for consumption. Commercially available foods were discouraged, especially ones that were flavoured.

The presence of hair, insects or rat droppings in food was not acceptable. Food smelt by humans or animals was not eaten and so was food touched by the lower castes. There are several rules of etiquette for dining, most of which are based on commonsense. Gradually as the Aryans spread themselves all over India, the entire country adapted to their ways of food and life.

Interesting trivia

- The Kashyapa Samhiti (200 BC) has detailed accounts of every aspect of rice cultivation: sowing, irrigation, seed transplanting, weeding, watering, protection from birds (using scarecrows), defense against vermin and finally threshing. Even conditions for second round of crops are elaborated. Methods that are followed to this day.
- Vegetarianism was predominant in India because of the sheer abundance of food available, even before the Vedic times. Cereals, pulses, oilseeds, vegetables, fruits and milk flowed freely. Nowhere else in the world one saw this kind of abundance. Indeed the land of milk and honey!
- Clay, wood, metal and stone were materials commonly used in making utensils. Leather vessels were used for storing liquids.
- Practice of rinsing the mouth before and after eating was common.
- Moderation in food consumption was advocated in those times too. It was said that eating only twice a day would make a person wise and intelligent. People fasted on the day of a sacrifice.
- Evil effects of drinking was put in the category of sins, it was one of the seven sins along with anger, senselessness and gambling.



Festivals and Feast of India

Salma Hussain

India has an amazing range of glittering festivals that mark the calendar. These festivals are associated with culinary delicacies and are celebrated with much fervor and gusto. No celebration is considered complete without the rich table adorned with traditional cuisine of the festival, like Gujya on Holi and mithai on Diwali., Haleem in Murram and turkey on Christmas day.

India is a land of bewildering diversity, a unique and colorful mosaic of people of various faiths. These diverse, rich and colorful cultural currents create a harmonious hymn known as India. They become one, retaining their unique individual identity. Many festivals revolve around the seasons such as harvest season, welcoming spring with joy, after the dust and heat of summer, some commemorate

great historical figures and events, or express devotion to the deities, saints and prophets. Some festivals are common all over the country but are celebrated differently. Every celebration centers on the rituals of prayers, seeking of blessings and are connected with culinary delicacies. Feasting during festivals is an expression of the spirit of celebration. They are observed with enthusiasm and gaiety and are occasions when the family and friends come together. They also present women with an opportunity to socialize. The festivals have special significance too, like Diwali is for the family, Karva Chauth for husband, Jamai Shashti for son-in-law, Bhai Dooj for brother and Raksha Bandhan for sister.

The country binds relationships through its festivals and the burning fire in the kitchen brings them together to relish a variety of dishes different for each festival. The birth of a child, a death at the age of 100, a marriage on completion of an important milestone, completion of a fasting period is also celebrated with great gusto. In short, these festivals illustrate the unification of diversity in culture, religion, and social aspects. They are faces and voices of India's ancient traditions. In these festivals, the country finds its many faces, its vibrant colors, and creativity of its people. These festivals bring life to the monotonous living of every day life.

Festivals in India bring with them wonderful and delicious food items. Every festival has some special dishes associated with it, without which the celebrations are incomplete. India is majorly an agrarian based country and most of its festivals do reflect this. Festivals, which center around the change of season are Basant Panchami, Holi, Nauroz and Bihu. Basant Panchami is mostly celebrated festival in North India. Basant means spring and Panchami signifies the tithi or the date which falls on the fifth day, of the month of Magh of the Hindu calendar. This is the time to usher in the season of spring in Northern India, it is the time when mother nature is at

its best and joy is in the air, the fields are rich with the yellow mustard crop and the sky is clear blue. Yellow is the color of the season. Celebrating in traditional style, the people wear yellow color clothes and cook exotic meals of yellow color. Mehfilis are arranged to enjoy the music of Raag Basant. There is a feeling of abundance and thus gaiety in the atmosphere. Friends and families get together to enjoy the cool breeze of spring with dance and music and a lavish spread of yellow colored food. Besan karhi boils in the cauldron ready to soak freshly made pakoras, puffed puris to be eaten with pumpkin sabzi, tempting spicy diamond shaped besan qatli cooked in lagan, basanti aloo and fragrant yellow rice. In parts of western India it is dhokla and gatte ki sabzi, which dominates the scene. An assortment of besan ke laddoo, barfi, and katoras full of pumpkin kheer stamp their signature at the very end of the meal.

Holi, the festival of colors, is one of the most strikingly beautiful festivals of India and falls in the Spring.

Holi has been celebrated in India since time immemorial but the popularity of Holi celebrations seems to be rising with every passing year. Holi is the time for fun and



feasting. It's the time to enjoy some delicious delicacies to bright up the festive mood. From savories to intoxicating drinks. Among all food Gujia is one of the most popular sweet dishes of Holi. It is a must for every North Indian home during the festival of Holi. There are 'papis' and 'dahi vade' to add to the lists. Then you have the intoxicating 'bhang-ke-vade,' kanji and thandai laced with bhang, which is specially made for Holi and is the most awaited drink of the day. Sweets are offered to the visitors that come and play with colors and enjoy the hospitality of the host. Malpuas, puranpolies and kanji vadas, kathal ki zabzi and dal kachori are some of the other popular dishes of Holi.

Navroz, is the Persian New Year, beginning on the first day of the spring, 21st March. Navroz has its origin in the time of great kings of ancient Persia.

The Parsi community in India celebrates the festival in its traditional way. The New Year means new life to them. This celebration places constant emphasis on the newness of life. About two weeks before Navroz, wheat or other grain is sown in a sandy bed. By Navroz eve the green shoots are well in evidence and the clump is divided according to the number of family members, each tied with a colorful ribbon and set on the haft seen (seven S's) table,



symbolic of the roots of life. Seven food items beginning with an 'S' must be placed on the table, the number seven probably relating to the seven days of the week or the seven planets of the solar system. The seven items are: Seb (apple) Sir(garlic), Sumak (a kind of spice) Sabzi (herbs) Sirka (vinegar), Sikke (coin) and a sweet pudding made with wheat called Samanoo. The table would also have a bowl of water with a green leaf floating in it, fresh fruit, eggs, meat, fish, fowl, sweetmeat, pastries, grains and nuts. These are raw food all used for meals throughout the holiday period.

The People in the different states of South India - Karnatka, Andhra and Kerala, celebrate Ugadi, the Telugu New Year day. Gatherings of the extended family and a sumptuous feast are the key for the day. The day, however, begins with ritual, showers (oil bath) followed by prayers, and then the consumption of a specific mixture of six tastes, called Ugadi Pachhadi, comprising of neem buds, raw mango, tamarind juice, green chilli, jaggery, ripe banana pieces and salt. Every member of the family has to eat this chutney as a ritual after offering it to the deity. This mixture of different tastes symbolizes the fact that life is a mixture of different experiences (sadness, happiness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise), which should be accepted together and with equanimity.



In Karnataka a special dish called Obattu or Holige, is prepared. In Andhra Pradesh, a special dish called Bhakshyalu or Bobbatlu (Puran Poli) are prepared on this occasion. It consists of a filling (Bengal gram and Jaggery /sugar boiled and made in to a paste) stuffed in a flat roti like bread. It is usually eaten hot/cold with ghee as a topping or with coconut milk at some places in Karnataka.

Puranpoli

It is interesting to note that there is no festival, which celebrates three seasons together except Bihu in Assam.

Bihu is the most important festival of Assam observed to mark the onset of new agriculture season and the new Assamese year and spreads over spring to autumn, representing three phases of human life.

This harvest festival occurs thrice a year as Rongali Bihu, Kati Bihu and Bhogali Bihu, special dishes made of flattened rice, curds, and jaggery are prepared and eaten during Rongali Bihu. The main feasting with exotic specialties of Assam is seen during Bhogali Bihu which is celebrated in Magha immediately after the winter harvest. The word 'bhogali' comes from bhoga which translates to 'feast' and the festival is essentially one of feasting and merry making after a good harvest. Every villager contributes in some way or the other to this feast. Special structures called meji,

made of hay from the newly harvested field, banana leaves and green bamboo stalks are constructed in the fields. These structures are the venue for the community feasts in which special meat and fish dishes are prepared. Young people stay up all night in the meji, singing, dancing and talking around a bonfire. Mouthwatering dishes of fish like bengana khar, (a dish of eggplant and fish), sitol fish curry, fish fry. The sugary delights that are hard to resist are the lip smacking koat pitha (banana and jaggery dish) ghila pitha (jaggery mix with rice), pogi meva (makhana and jaggery) til pitha, til ladoo and doi sira.

The festival of Makar Sankranti is also not different from the other Indian festivals. Makar Sankranti also referred to as Pongal in parts of the South, is a celebration of the "ascent" of the sun to the North. The festival marks the coldest day of the winter (14 January), after which the biting cold begins to taper off. In the South, prayers are offered to the sun god, because without the sun, there would be no harvest.

During the festival, the most commonly eaten foods are sesame seeds and jaggery sweets, rice cooked with milk,



Celebration in Meji Assam

jaggery and sugar drops Lots of cooking takes place on this day as well. Makar Sankranti is an harvest festival which celebrates the produce of rice all around India. A harvest festival is always celebrated with delicious dishes. One of these dishes is 'Bandaru laddu' - a famous Andhra sweet dish, another one is 'Ariselu' which is a popular delicacy of South India. Last but not the least is the 'Kajji Kaayalu', another mouthwatering delicacy that is made with a sweet stuffing.

As mentioned, Pongal, one of the most important popular Hindu four-day festival of thanksgiving to nature takes its name from the Tamil word meaning "to boil" and symbolizes the excess and plentiful of harvest and prosperity. The festival is held in the month of January during the season when rice and other cereals, sugar-cane, and turmeric (essential ingredient in Tamil cooking) are harvested.



Celebration of Pongal

Tamilians say 'Thai pirandhaal vazhi pirakkum', and believe that knotty family problems will be solved during Pongal. This is traditionally the month of weddings as the riches gained from a good harvest are spent on expensive family occasions like weddings.

The harvest festival of Tamil Nadu has two main dishes on its course as 'Sweet Pongal' and 'Salt Pongal' along

with other side dishes of rice and 'Avial', a concoction of vegetables. The four-day festival has a variety of dishes associated with the days of Pongal. On the first day, rice, being central to the south Indian cuisine and also to the festival itself is cooked in different ways. There is also vadai (fried chickpea patties) and poli (sweet pancake). On this day only the members of the family eat together.

On the second day, the day of the celebration itself, food is cooked only by the women of the house and not by servants. There are two special foods for this day, venpongal (mixture of steamed rice and dal) which is salty, and chakkarai pongol (jaggery and ghee mixed to steamed dal and rice) that is sweet. Apart from these, rice in various forms – boiled, fried, sweet and salty – is also eaten. Sugarcane is very much a part of the festival and is eaten all the time in Pongal. Pongal is all about spreading of love and joy in the neighboring homes and enjoy the festival with family and friends.

In the months of August-September the state of Kerala celebrates its most important three day festival called Onam. According to mythology, this land was home to king Mahabali-grandson of Prahlad. This three-day celebration is in memory of the reign of this great king. The people believe that Mahabali comes to Kerala at this time to see his subjects because of a boon granted to him by the Lord Vishnu. Every home in Kerala buzzes with activity during Onam. Boat races are organized on a grand scale.

Deliciously cooked food is served on huge banana leaves. Rice is the main dish served with different types of vegetable curries. Sambhar and rassam of tomato, lady finger khichdi and dosais of various kind are part of the meal. Curd and kheer along with banana halwa, dry fruit keshri, are part of the special menu. Pickle and banana chips are favorite accompaniments.



Onam feast

Besides spring and harvest festivals, remembrance of gods and goddesses are also commemorated by great festivals in India.

Durga Puja

The worship of Durga in the autumn ('Shorot') is the year's largest Hindu festival in West Bengal, Orissa, Tripura, Assam, Jharkhand and other parts of East India as well as in Bangladesh. Durga Puja is also celebrated in Nepal and Bhutan according to local traditions and variations. Durga Puja in Bengal is a carnival, where people from all backgrounds, regardless of their religious beliefs, participate and enjoy themselves to the hilt. Durgas Puja is celebrated from the sixth to tenth day of the waxing moon in the month of 'Ashwin', which is the sixth month in the Bengali calender. No festival in India is incomplete without celebrating food. Whenever we talk of festival we think of the special dishes prepared for the occasion. Durga Puja is also one of the festivals where special emphases on sweets are given. This festival is mainly celebrated in the West Bengal, which is famous for sweets, a wide variety of

sweet is available readily in the market, and are also made at home. Bhog (ritual offering) is traditionally served out every day on the wake of the puja, which is a proper meal. This includes moong dal khichri (mixture of dal and rice), charchari (mixture of various vegetables), payesh (kheer) and a delicious tomato chutney indigenous to Bengal.

Although Bengalis are known for their sweet tooth, their puja cuisine consists of a number of spicy dishes as well. Nonetheless, they add a tinge of sugar to some of their dishes. Some of the Bengali spicy dishes that have gained popularity over the years include Chola Dal, Bandhakopar Dalna and Aloo Posto. Recipes cooked during Durga Puja period have been same over the centuries. On 'sasthi' the day of 'bodhon', vegetarian items are prepared: fruits and sweets for the women, rice, curry, dal and sweets for the men. On 'saptami' the fare is non-vegetarian; rice, fish, cauliflower, and sweets in the morning, and lobsters, mutton and sweets in the evening. The vegetarian recipes on 'ashtami' are similar to those of 'sashti'. The recipes of 'navami' are similar to those of 'sashti'.

Ganesh Chaturthi

Ganesh Chaturthi touches Maharashtra in a similar way! Ganpati bappa Morya, Mangal Moorti Morya are sounds with drum beats, which fill the whole state of Maharashtra during this festival. This annual festival in honour of Shri Ganesh or Sri Ganapati has been observed for at least 250 years, and perhaps since the 12th century. Special prasad and Saatvik food (cooked without onions and garlic) are prepared to mark the days of puja. Lord Ganesh is known for his inclination towards sweets. therefore, a festival dedicated to Lord Ganesha is always celebrated with special sweet dishes, like modak and tilgul. Similarly rawa laddoo, puranpoli and ullydarai are some of the other traditional sweets of the festival.



Modak, Ganesh Prasad

Guru Purab

India is a secular country and many religions are practiced. This is a country where Hindus, Muslim, Christians and Sikhs live together and each one of them has complete liberty to enjoy and celebrate their own festivals. Guru Purab, known as the “festival of the Gurus” are the major festivals of the Sikhs.

The celebrations of the Guru Purabs are marked by celebrating the birth days of the ten Sikh Gurus. The festival is usually of three days, two days before the birthday; Akhand Path (reading of Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of Sikhs) is practiced. A procession led by the Panj Pyaras (Five Beloved Ones), carrying the Sikh flag known as Nishan Sahib and the Paalki (palanquin), of Sri Guru Grant Sahib, is organized one day before the birthday. This procession is accompanied by singers singing hymns, Gatka teams (martial arts) performing ability and art, bands playing devotional tunes, preachers, and innumerable followers. The day of the birthday is started with Asa-di-Var (morning hymns) and other hymns



from the holy book followed by Kathav (exposition of the scripture). Finally, the celebration ends with the serving of Langar (community lunch) in which food is served to rich and poor people without any discrimination in the name of religion, caste or sex.

Guru Nanak passed away in 1539, leaving behind a revolutionary movement participated by all religions from every part of the country to remove discriminations and sectarian coventions. The festivals are also sometimes known as “Prakash Utsav” which owes its origin to the belief of the Sikhs that Guru Nanak was the one to bring enlightenment to the world.

Christmas

Christmas is celebrated by the Christian community living in India, the festival has taken regional color in India. Christmas carols are sung in Hindi and midnight service is carried out in regional languages. Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

In most places around the world, Christmas Day is celebrated on December 25th. Turkey is often regarded as



the central dish to the Christmas meal but appeared on the menu only around 1650 after European colonization of North America. Sebastian Cabot introduced it to Europe on his return from the New World. The bird got its name after merchants from Turkey made it a popular dish. Prior to this Swan, Goose, Peacock or Boar were associated with the Christmas feast

Traditional Christmas meal varies world around according to their geographical situation. In Australia steaks of chicken, in Germany roast goose accompanied by vegetable, in USA turkey and varieties of vegetable and in the U.K., Christmas pudding and mince pie are top food during Christmas. The largest Christmas pudding weighed 7,231 pounds (3.28 tones) and was made at Aughton, Lancashire on 11 July 1992. The largest Mince Pie weighed 2,260 pounds (1.02 tones) and measured 6.1m X 1.5m. It was baked in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire on 15 October 1932. Sadly the Pie was destroyed in a German air raid when the pilot of a Stuka dive-bomber mistook it for a train. special Christmas beers are made by brewers but Champagne remains the popular traditional drink of the day. However in India Turkey and plum cake remain the favorite Christmas recipes.

Diwali

Diwali in India is celebrated with jubilation and enthusiasm. Diwali signifies the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom after being banished for 14 years. It is one of the biggest festivals of the Hindus. The festival is celebrated with lighting of Diyas, decorating houses with colorful lights and burning of crackers. During the evening, Lakshmi Puja is performed to seek divine blessings of the Goddess of Wealth. People also exchange Diwali Gifts with their dear ones. Days before the festival, the ladies of the family, start preparing traditional delicacies, in keeping with the tradition to distribute sweets to the friends and neighbors. So Diwali can not be imagined without sweets and savories that are specially made at home. The list of Diwali special sweets is exhaustive. Gulab Jamun, barfi, kalakand, Gajar Ka Halwa, Besan Ke Ladoo, Karanji and Jalebis are the most commonly made sweets. But now with the fear of adulteration sale of sweets has gone down tremendously and hampers of fruits and dry fruits have taken its place.

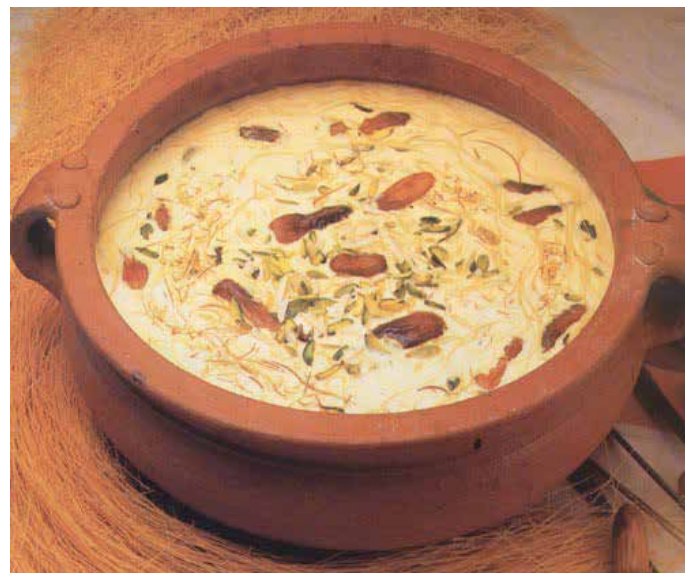
Apart from sweet dishes, there are several other delicacies that are made on the occasion. The Diwali cuisines also depend upon the culture and family traditions. All across



India, several mouth-watering delights are prepared in various manners depending upon the prevailing custom and taste of the family members.

Ramadan and Eid

In India, Muslims constitute the second largest population group of the country. They celebrate their festivals with total freedom and with great gusto. The month of Ramadan is a month of delicious food, which is not seen in other 11 months of the year. Like any other festival, preparation of iftar recipes differ from region to region. In Northern India – in Delhi, aloo and gobhi pakoras, fruit chat and chana daal savory with chopped onion and chopped coriander are central to every iftar table, in Lucknow shami kababs and parathas, chicken tikka and phirni are part of the iftar meal. Whereas in Western India, in Mumbai, pakoras, pathoras, minced meat samosas, sandan, a savory of steamed rice flour, grilled liver and spleen, chana batata and sharbats according to season remain popular for iftar. Halleem is the ace food of Ramadhan in Hyderabad whereas Kerala has its own flavors like Sabudanakheer,



finger prawn, meat patiri, chicken pepper fry and paalaada. After a whole month's fasting comes the festival of Eid-ul-fitr, the great celebration Day.

The Eid-ul-Fitr is a very joyous day; it is truly a Thanksgiving Day for the Muslims. On this day Muslims celebrate the real joy of food after starving and experiencing hunger of 30 days. It teaches them to value food and understand the hardship of hunger of other less fortunate humans. It is a lesson in sacrifice and a test of will power. Eid is celebrated with cooking of qormas and biryanis, kababs and murg Mussallam and this delicious meal is rounded up with sheer khuma and muzaffar special desserts of the Eid.

The second Eid, which in fact is only a ritual, sees delicious mouth watering exotic dishes of the meat. This is a festival of sacrifice and each family adheres to it religiously. There is plenty of meat in every family to prepare exotic dishes. Kabas sizzle on iron griddles and leg of lamb is roasted in tandoor, liver and lamb tikkas are on hot grill to be eaten hot.

A variety of other meat dishes like qorma, pasandas, chops, brain cutlets, do-piyazas and varieties of pulao, besides biriyani are cooked and enjoyed with the family. However the specialty of the day is, whole goat filled with rice, eggs and dry fruits with spices.

Muharram

Muharram though not a festival of joy, does not lack traditional food preparations, which also differs from region to region. In Mumbai, the cauldrons of khichra (lamb cooked with seven grains) cooked on coal fire are very inviting and in Hyderabad lagans of qubuli (a fragrant aromatic pulao of bengal gram) spread their aroma around. Badam ka sherbat and doodh ka sherbat are distributed all over in memory of the imams who sacrificed their lives in



the battle of Karbala. In Lucknow, with a majority of shia population the scenario has a different color.

During Muharram all the imambaras big or small are lit up and the sound of matam can be heard in every nook and corner of the city. Nawab Jiyo, incharge of the bara Imambara in Lucknow, said that during the days of Nawabi rule, Muharram was celebrated in great style. Alams and patkas for the Muharram procession were ordered much in advance. Curtains for Imambaras and veils for the rozas were prepared with finest zardozi work.

Besides decoration of Imambaras, food also played an important role in Muharram celebrations. Throughout 10 days, Nawabs, taluqdars and distinguish personalities of Lucknow received Tabarruk from the Imambaras which consisted of one small sheermal, 2 khamiri roti, one dish of lamb pulao, one bowl of tale aloo ka salan, and 1 handi of barfi or a bowl of zarda.

With the end of feudal days all these practices have come to an end except the ordinary tabarruk of sheermal and

tale aloo ka salan, which is distributed to all after the majlis at imambaras.

Jamai Shasti

A beautiful festival called 'Jamai Shasti' is celebrated in Kolkata which displays beautiful bonding of son-in-law with his in-laws. The traditional festival, Jamaishasthi, originated ages ago as a part of a women's socio-religious duty. The son-in-law is called 'Jamai' and 'Shasti' means sixth, thus the festival is observed on sixth day of shukla paksh in Jyestha month of traditional Hindu calendar. This popular social custom lays foundation of a strong family bonding. All the sons-in-law get a treat from his in-laws or 'Shoshur bari'. The Hindu families all over West Bengal celebrate the day.

A party is organized the in-laws for their daughter and her husband. Mothers-in-law cook special dishes and invite their daughter and sons-in-law to honor them with a feast that essentially consists of Hilsa fish. Mother-in-law performs the ritual in which a plate having six fruits is touched with the Jamai's forehead. The festival plays a vital role in bringing the couple especially the son-in-law (Jamai) closer to their family thus helps in making family ties stronger. Bengalis are famous for their love for food. After performing the rituals, a small feast is organized. The best and favorite delicacies of one's son-in-law are prepared. The guests are then served exotic Bengali dishes. Various fish delicacies, prawn malaikari and the most famous Bengali sweet 'Sandesh' are a must. The mother-in-law fans her son-in-law with a palm leaf while he gorges on his food.

In short, there is no end to Indian festival one ends and other appears with its own set of delicacies. It is an unending chain. So live life to your best and enjoy the festivals with their festivities and delicacies.



Kashmir Cuisine - A Treasure Trove

Saleem Beg

Cuisine is primarily rooted in the tradition, climate, as also in the availability of base materials and ingredients. However, it is also one of those cultural manifestations that have remained open to the influences from outside. Located at the cross roads of the subcontinent, Central and Middle Asia with borders stretching from Russia to Afghanistan, Kashmir has been called a melting pot of

cultures, a crucible of thoughts and influences. Trade or transit revealed itself as a social act that inspired allied cultural processes as well. Along with merchandise, traders of the yore brought along their living traditions of costumes, life styles and above all, the cuisine. Kashmir for reasons of history and geography has received these outside influences through caravans and traders visiting

for purposes of faith, pilgrimage, trade and commerce. Like other crafts and skills, cuisine evolved organically over the decades and centuries. We know from travelogues of traders that condiments like saffron, a local precious condiment with established medicinal properties, remained in use in cooking since medieval period from around 10th century and also found its way into the cuisines of other regions.

Kashmiri cooking and culinary craftsmanship evolved as separate entities for Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims. Both may favor mutton largely, but are generally different in the way these are cooked and served. Unlike many other parts of the sub-continent, Kashmiri Pandits who call themselves Brahmins, have been great mutton eaters like Kashmiri Muslims. Pandit cuisine uses dried ginger and asafoetida generously, while Muslim cookery uses onions and garlic. Another basic determinant of these separate cooking practices has been use of hing mixed with curd by pundits and shallot mixed with garlic by Muslims. Mach (meat balls), kaeli (a yellow lamb or paneer gravy) and roganjosh (a spicy gravy with lamb chunks) form the essence of Pandit cookery. Pandit cooking is based on the gregarious use of Kashmiri red chilli powder, tumeric and saunf. The recipes extract their wondrous aroma



from green and black cardamom, cinnamon and clove and Kashmiri zeera or shah zeera straight from the Valley that lends these dishes a divine taste. Mutton, the basic ingredient, remains common to both the cuisines. Pandits do have vegetarian feasts as well but the vegetarian meal is always a poor cousin. One specialty relished in both non vegetarian and vegetarian pandit cuisine is nadroo, the locally grown lotus stem cooked in curd with another variant of deep fried thinly sliced pieces of the lotus stem.

The lead cuisine of Muslims is known as Wazawan. As mentioned, Muslim cuisine has been greatly influenced by traders and travelers who during their sojourn in Kashmir, carried cooks as part of their entourage. The visitors transacted with local community and joined in the feasting which, in the process resulted in transfer of recipes as well. Thus, Armenian, Andalusian, Afghan and Iranian dishes crept in with some modification and became part of the Muslim cuisine. The Wazwan is a family craft transferred from father to son, mostly by way of apprenticeship. It is an art form still practiced by the professional cooking families known as Wazas. The processing of raw material involves converting meat into raw materials for various dishes by use of mince, pounded or finally cut pieces of mutton. These Wazas also claim that they are descendents





of master chefs who migrated from Samarkand and parts of Central Asia at the beginning of 15th century with the influx that continued during the following centuries as well. Wazawan, the field of delicacies has been extended to a range comprising of 36 courses. These delicacies are generally cooked at night under the expert supervision of Wazas assisted by retinue of wazas. Muslim cuisine is a gourmet, a trove of exotica to savour.

Pandits, while retaining the basic character of their cuisine also tried their hand on the exotica. A specific example of this phenomena would be soft ribs from mutton known as tabakmaz in Wazwan and Kabargah in the pandit cuisine. The method of preparation remains exactly the same for this dish. Incidentally this preparation seems to have travelled from Kazakhstan where it is known by its pandit name- Kabargah. Over the years, condiments and spices took a similar color and the same spices were used by



both the cuisines. The traditional Kashmir food receives heat on two sides, top and bottom and the best results are obtained by using charcoal fire.

Cuisine has also followed and catered to religious observances and practices linked to the faith. Kashmiri cuisine has thus adjusted itself and catered to the local spiritual traditions. Kashmir has the distinction of following a syncretic belief known as the Rishi philosophy. Rishis - the local saints, mostly drawn from rural Kashmir and men of religion owe their allegiance to the patron Saint of Kashmir- Sheikh Noorudin Wali. Sheikh is a 15th Century Rishi who propagated monotheism, equality of all human beings before the Almighty, sanctity of living beings and respect for diversity. Sheikh in his poetic rendition called shruks, mentioned that, he has drawn his spiritual prowess from the Lal Ded, a Shaivite yogini who was a contemporary of the Sheikh. Besides an elaborate set of teachings, he also abstained from eating all kinds of non vegetarian food and did not approve of slaughtering of animals. His followers spread the message and teachings of the Sheikh throughout Kashmir. They established hospices in different parts of Kashmir where annual festival or Urs were celebrated on fixed days,



normally extending over a week. Traditionally feasting and community meals is part of the celebrations. Muslims, mainly residing around these hospices abstain from eating non vegetarian food in any form. The Muslim cooks and the wazas, have therefore created a vegetarian cuisine for the occasion of the Urs that is served during the week. The multiple dishes, all based on vegetables, have names mostly akin to the non vegetarian dishes. As mentioned earlier, mutton is the otherwise the source and basis for the Muslim cuisine.





It is worth mention, that the interesting difference between the two cuisines is, that they are served differently. In the case of Kashmiri Pandits, the food is served in a much more informal manner and remains available for hours together. The Muslim cuisine is served in a more formal way. Muslim feasts are more orderly and follow a discipline and a set plan. In these feasts, food is served in a large tin plated and carved copper plate known as trami. The guests sit on the floor and once the dastarkhan - printed or white cloth is laid on ground in a carpeted space of a dewan khana or as the practice is now, in a profusely decorated shamiyana or tent, the guests group themselves in fours. A mobile wash basin made of copper with intricate carving known as Tash-i-nari is taken around by attendants so that guests can wash their hands to enable them to eat with fingers. The trami, covered with a copper cover, a sarposh, is served to each group. The trami has boiled rice with finely laid out items like kababs, meath, tabak maz, saffron chicken, etc. Once the tramis are laid for the whole majlis, sarposh is removed from the trami and guests are then expected to start enjoying the feast. The cook then enters to serve dishes, one by one in a sequence that has not changed since perhaps when these dishes got introduced in the menu.

There are seven standard dishes that are must for Wazawan.

These are rista, rogan josh, dhania kurma, paneer with tomato, mirchi korma, aab ghosh and gushtaba. At least two to three vegetables are also now part of the serving and these vegetable are cooked in the mutton gravy. Gushtaba-pounded mutton balls cooked in processed curd, is the final dish announcing the completion of servings. Curd is served with each trami along with accompanying chutneys made out of vegetables and seeds like radish, zirish, pumpkin etc. These accompaniments, an essential part of the feast, do not somehow find mention in the writings about the cuisine. Some of these accompaniments are zerish chetin- a chutney made of small black berry and tamarind pulp, red chilli powder, black pepper and salt. Other chutneys, are made out of onion. The gand chetin, pumpkin chetin are made of softened pumpkin with curd and honey, almond based chutney and sliced radish. These accompaniments are meant to neutralize the taste of one dish to enable the guest to appreciate and savour another dish.

Thus, Kashmiri cuisine is a fine art that has evolved into an elaborate spread by integrating local techniques and traditional knowledge with influences received through interaction by way of trade, commerce, literary and religious interactions.

Some Pathare Prabhu Receptions

Chitkala Kirtikar

Mumbai today is the hometown to people of almost all the castes and communities that comprise our nation and to a large expatriate population. But who are its original inhabitants? The Kolis of course: the fishing community that dotted the seven islands of Mumbai from its Southern tip around today's Cuffe Parade to the Northern reaches of Vasai & Virar. After the Kolis came the Zoroastrian Parsees, around the 8th Century A.D., fleeing from the alien invaders of Persia. Then came the Pathare Prabhus (PPs) in the 13th Century. The Prabhus had a long oral history going back to Lord Ram and his descendant Ashvapati from whom they claimed their own descent. King Ashvapati ruled over areas around Nepal and Bihar and his descendants moved South and West looking for greener pastures until in the 13th Century, they settled along the coast around the area that is today the country's commercial capital. The Prabhus were warriors but set great store by reading and writing and were also known to be good account and document keepers, knowledge

skills that they carried forward into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. With the coming of the British, the Pathare Prabhus came into their own in the courts and offices as lawyers, solicitors, karkuns, accountants as well as property owners, educationists and doctors. They were a wealthy community, owning mainly urban land around the growing city of Bombay and in the nearby hill stations of Matheran, Khandala, Lonavla as well as the extensive salt pans and agricultural lands that they leased out for cultivation. They were not only wealthy, but also forward looking. They brought up their children, both girls and boys, to be well educated and ambitious. They were fun loving, lived and dressed and ate well and competed with the Parsees in adopting a westernized outlook and manner. They started sending their boys to London to become barristers and doctors. The girls were encouraged to learn music, poetry, riding, singing and to acquire professional training as doctors, lawyers, educationists and writers.



Another area in which the Pathare Prabhus excelled was in their cuisine. Having come to rest finally near the coast, they developed a cuisine strong in sea food, coconut, cashew, bananas and other products of the coastal area around Bombay. In addition to the traditional methods of cooking, they acquired from the Parsees and the British, the art of baking.

The documented history of my own family goes back to 1811 when my ancestors, Wasudev and Jagannath Kirtikar, bought 104 acres of land for the princely sum of Rs.600 from the Collector of Land Revenue, Salsette in present day Bhayander,



a suburb of Mumbai, for the purpose of salt panning. The original documents of the sale deed are available with the Director of Archives, Govt. of Maharashtra. I have a copy of the document, the original of which is on silk parchment. The salt pans still exist in almost their original condition. Wasudev and Jagannath Kirtikar, I suspect, did not expend their own energies in the arduous process of salt panning, but employed others for carrying out the job. Their children and grand children entered the legal profession. The Kirtikar Law Library within the precincts of the High Court of Judicature in Mumbai is named after the son of Jagannath. One of their descendants, Vaman, my grandfather, was sent off to London in 1911 to read for the bar, but not before having been first married off safely to a Pathare Prabhu bride, Sumati Kothare. He returned loyally to his bride a couple of years later and they settled down in Bombay in their ancestral home in Girgaon. Vaman, the young Bar-at-Law pursuing his career in the Courts of Mumbai and Sumatibai looking after the home, raising their children and of course, cooking.

Sumatibai, my paternal grandmother, was the granddaughter of Nanu Narayan Kothare, a Solicitor, The firm of Solicitors he set up, namely Nanu Hormasjee and Sons, exists till today and is now looked after by his great great grandson and my cousin Nimish Kothare. Sumatibai

was accomplished, and an inveterate traveler. Her trunks used to be always packed and ready and she would be off visiting family and friends or places of pilgrimage with her faithful Bhagabai in tow, rations, kerosene stove, etc, neatly stowed in the trunks. At such times we missed her cooking and awaited her return eagerly. I give below some of her recipes, packaged as a menu for a generous meal for 4 to 5 persons. It consists of 2 vegetables, 2 non-vegetarian recipes, rice, a sweet and accompaniments. I have selected simple recipes, easy to make with local ingredients readily available. More complicated recipes, with crabs, lobsters, rarely found ingredients and vegetables can be made available on request/demand! PP garam masala, known as gode masala, adds a lot of zing and zest to vegetarian preparations - can be supplied on request. Excellent recipes for snacks, using mincemeat, eggs, potatoes, cabbage, green peas, etc, and fish preparations using coconut and kokum, are also available.

I have added a rice khichadi recipe with its coconut curry accompaniment. The Pathare Prabhus are fond of hot, spicy food, made in generous amounts of oil or ghee. If you find the chillies too much, you might reduce the quantities. But the oil should not be reduced, otherwise the taste will be un-PP like.



Paplet Che Bhujaney (Pomfret Curry)

Do not use fresh water fish. It does not suit this recipe.

Ingredients

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Pomfret | Two whole, cleaned, sliced, head & tail preserved. |
| Onion | 2 medium, chopped fine. |
| Garlic | 10 pods, ground into a paste. |
| Green chillies | 6 to 8, sliced lengthwise. |
| Coriander leaves | One small bunch, cleaned and chopped. |
| Haldi | ½ teaspoon. |
| Red chilli powder | 3 teaspoon (use Kashmiri chili powder for its colour) |
| Salt | to taste. |
| Oil | At least 4 tbsp. Use ground nut oil for best results. Sunflower oil will do. |

Method

In a thick bottomed pan, preferably brass, add the chopped onion, garlic paste, slit green chillies, coriander leaves, haldi, red chilly powder and salt. Using your finger tips, crush well together so that the juices of the ingredients start to flow out and meld together. The salt helps this process. Then add the oil. I would personally use more oil than suggested here as it imparts a good texture to the finished dish. Add about ½ katori of water and place on a low flame. The water will start to bubble. Immediately slip in the slices of pomfret. Simmer for 3 to 4 minutes, turning over the slices once so that they are evenly coated with the oil and spices. Serve immediately with plain fluffy rice.

Tajle Double T (lamb)

Mutton was always known as Double T at home. The following is a dry preparation that goes well with rotis and phulkas, accompanied by the carrot salad, the recipe for which is given below.

Ingredients

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Mutton | Mostly boneless from the shoulder, ½ Kg, cut into bite sized cubes. A few bones will do. |
| Small round potatoes | ¼ Kg, peeled and washed. |
| Small onions | ¼ Kg, peeled and washed. |
| Coriander leaves | A small bunch, cleaned and chopped. |
| Ginger | A small piece, slivered. |
| Cinnamon | A 1½" long piece. |
| Cloves | 5 to 6. |
| Black pepper corns | 6 to 8. |
| Dhania powder | 1½ tsp. |
| Red chilly powder | 2 tsp. |
| Asafoetida (heeng) | 1/3 tsp. |
| Salt | to taste. |
| Oil | 1/3 katori. |

Method

Thoroughly wash the mutton under running water. Place in a colander. Place the colander in a larger pan with a little water at the bottom and cover. The idea is to cook the mutton without immersing it in water. Cook the mutton for 50 to 60 minutes until almost tender, but not yet tender enough to eat. Alternatively, you can pressurize it in a pressure cooker. But do not allow it to become too tender.

In a Kadhai, preferably an iron one, add the oil and place on a medium flame. When the oil is warm, add the cinnamon,

the pepper corns, and the cloves. Do not fry or saute. Then add the steamed mutton, the potatoes, ginger, dhania powder, heeng and salt. Do not cover. You can add a little of the water left over from the steaming if required. Let the ingredients cook and blend, turning them over once in a while so that the salt and spices are evenly absorbed. Once the potatoes start to soften, add the onions and red chilly powder. Keep sprinkling a little water and turning over once in a while until the potatoes and the mutton are soft enough to eat and the onions are well done. If you use sufficient oil, and an iron Kadhai, (as was done by my grandmother), the spices and the ingredients will blend beautifully and start browning, at the same time retaining their succulence. In the last few seconds of cooking add the chopped coriander and blend in nicely. Enjoy.

Methkutache Batatey (Potatoes with fenugreek)

This dish of potatoes in hot and spicy and slightly tangy and is eaten with plain rice and tuar dal. Very simple to make. You can't go wrong with this.

Ingredients

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Potatoes | 3 Large round ones, peeled and cut into ½ cm thick roundels. |
| Garlic | 10 pods, pounded into a paste. |
| Methidana powder | 1 heaped tsp. |
| Haldi | ½ tsp. |
| Dried kokum | 6 to 8 slivers (you can use the juice of one lemon instead). |
| Red chilly powder | 2½ tsp. |
| Salt | to taste. |
| Oil | ¼ Katori |

Method:

In a thick, flat bottomed pan add the oil and place on a low flame. Before the oil is too hot, add the garlic paste

and the methidana powder. Do not allow to brown. Add the potatoes, haldi, chilly powder and salt. Turn well so that the potatoes are well coated with the oil and spices. Add 1½ katoris of water. Allow to simmer, covering for the first 5 minutes. Continue to simmer, open, until the potatoes are well cooked, adding a little more water at a time if required. Once the potatoes are tender add the juice of 1 lemon. If using dried kokum, soak the kokum in a few spoonful of water and add this (kokum and water) to the simmering potatoes. Allow to simmer for a couple of minutes more. This is not a dry preparation. A little bit of moisture will remain once the potatoes are done. The resulting dish looks colourful and appetizing and smells heavenly. Use Kashmiri chilly powder and good quality haldi for that appealing and appetizing look!

Purnache Bhende (Stuffed Bhindi)

Ingredients

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Bhindi | ½ Kg. |
| Onions | 2 medium, chopped fine. |
| Green chillies | 4 to 8, depending on your taste, cut fine. |
| Besan | 4 tbsp. |
| Ajwain | ½ tsp |
| Haldi powder | 1/3 tsp. |
| Red chilly powder | 2 tsp. |
| Coriander leaves | 1 small bunch, cleaned and chopped |
| Fresh coconut grated | 2 to 3 tbs. |
| Salt | to taste. |
| Oil | 1/3 Katori. |

Method:

Wash bhindi thoroughly and top and tail. Cut each into 2 pieces. Then slit each piece lengthwise, twice, from the

top, and half way down, so that you can stuff the besan masala into each piece. Keep aside.

Prepare the besan masala by mixing together the besan, cut onions, green chillies, ajwain, haldi powder, red chilly powder, salt and half the coriander leaves. Add a little water so that the besan coheres. Stuff each piece of the cut bhindi with this masala. If some masala is left over, reserve.

Place a flat bottomed pan on a medium flame and add the oil to it. When the oil is hot, add the stuffed bhindi to it. Lower flame. Sprinkle with water and cover for not more than 3 minutes. Remove the cover, add the remaining besan masala, if any, and allow the bhindi to cook in its own moisture on a low flame. Once the bhindi is soft, turn up the flame and brown the bhindi slightly, without burning or overcooking it. Turn off the flame and add the reserved coriander leaves and grated coconut to the bhindi blending them in. The bhindi is ready to eat. This goes well with puris and phulkas.

Gajarachi Koshimbir (Carrot Salad) Ingredients

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Carrots | ¼ Kg. |
| Green chillies | 3 or 4, chopped fine. |
| Coriander leaves | A small bunch, cleaned and chopped |
| Salt | To taste. |
| Sugar | 1 tsp. |
| Lemon | The juice of 1 lemon. |
| Mustard seeds | 1 heaped tsp. |
| Asafoetida | 1 generous pinch. |
| Oil | A small quantity of oil. Till oil will do. PPs do not use mustard oil. But this salad tastes good in mustard oil as well. |

Method

Wash, peel and grate the carrots. Add the chopped green chillies, coriander leaves, salt, sugar and the lemon juice. Mix together with your fingers. Heat 2 to 3 tsps of oil and add the mustard seeds. As soon as they begin to crackle, add the asafoetida and then pour this tempering over the carrots.

Kakadichi Koshimbir (Cucumber salad)

Ingredients

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Cucumber | 3 or 4, peeled and diced into medium sized cubes. |
| Green chillies | 2 or 3, chopped fine. |
| Coriander eaves | A small bunch, cleaned and chopped fine. |
| Lemon | The juice of ½ lemon. |
| Peanuts | ½ Cup, roasted and ground fine. |
| Salt | To taste. |

Just before serving, combine all the above ingredients in a bowl and serve in an attractive salad bowl of suitable size. Do not prepare in advance and do not refrigerate, as the ground peanuts will lose their crunchiness.

Ananasache Sambhare (Pineapple sweet curry)

(Please see my recipe for Naralache Sheere for tips on how to obtain coconut milk).

Ingredients

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Pineapple | 200 gms. |
| Onion | 1 small, chopped fine. |
| Green Chillies | 3 to 4, slit lengthwise. |
| Cashew nuts | 8, halved. |

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Gramflour (Besan) | 1 tsp. |
| Haldi | ¼ tsp. |
| Asafoetida | A pinch. |
| Salt | To taste. |
| Sugar | 1 tsp. |
| Thick Coconut milk | 200 ml. |
| Oil | 3 tsp. |

Method

Dissolve the besan in 2 tablespoons of warmed coconut milk and ensure that all lumps blend and dissolve. Pour in the rest of the coconut milk, along with the haldi. Mix well. Reserve. Heat oil in a cooking pan. Add asafoetida, chillies and the chopped onion. Saute until the onion has softened. Add the pineapple pieces, the halved cashew nuts and a few tbsp of water and cook until the pineapple is tender but firm. Now add the coconut milk mixture to the pan, stirring continuously for 4-5 minutes. This will ensure that no lumps are formed and that the coconut milk does not curdle. Lower the heat, add the salt and sugar. Simmer the curry for another 2-3 minutes. Serve hot with plain rice.

Khichadi (Rice with peas, onions and spices)

This Khichadi can be had by itself or with papad and a tomato and onion kachumar. It goes well with Naralache Sheere, the recipe for which is also given below. But, when creating a menu with the recipes for fish, mutton and the vegetables given earlier, make plain fluffy rice to go with it.

Ingredients

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Rice | 1 Katori, washed and soaked in water for 1 hour. |
| Fresh Green peas | 1/3 Katori. |
| Onions | 3 Medium, washed peeled and cut into roundels. |

| | |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| Coriander leaves | 1 small bunch, washed and chopped. |
| Cinnamon | A 1" piece. |
| Pepper corns | 6 |
| Cloves | 4 to 5 |
| Red chilly powder | 1½ tsp. |
| Ghee | ¼ Katori. |
| Salt | To taste. |

Method

To a pressure cooker add the ghee and place on the flame. As the ghee starts to melt, add the cinnamon, cloves and peppercorns. As soon as these begin to sizzle, add the onion roundels and half of the salt. Turn up the flame to high and sauté the onions until they are partly softened. Do not brown. Lower flame. Add the rice, green peas, the remaining salt and red chilly powder. Keep turning over this mixture until the rice is nicely coated with the ghee (about 1 minute). Add the chopped coriander and mix in. Now add water. I normally add water by what is known as "andaz": 2½ katoris of water should do. The rice should be submerged, about ¾" under water. Cover with pressure lid, keep the flame on high and wait until the first whistle goes. Turn off the flame. Do not open immediately. Wait until the steam has been absorbed. Serve and eat hot. This Khichadi has a delicious aroma and a lovely honey brown colour.

Naralache Sheere (Coconut milk curry)

I ought to explain at the outset that the way coconut milk was extracted by my grandmother was a laborious one and involved first selecting a coconut, shaking it to ensure it had a good quantity of water inside (the sign of a good coconut), then breaking it open, saving the coconut water (or drinking it right away), then scraping out the white flesh which was then ground on a stone using a little warm

water. The milk of the ground flesh was then squeezed out into a container with your bare hands. This process was repeated twice using a separate container each time until the coconut flesh had given up all its delicious milk and was reduced to dry chaff. This milk of 3 different consistencies in the 3 different containers, was then used for different purposes, including making curry. The daily help who arrived in the morning was well attuned to this task and carried it out cheerfully. To make things easy, you can use coconut milk powder. I find that the Maggi coconut powder is nearest to the taste of the original.

Ingredients

| | |
|--|--|
| Onions | 2 medium, chopped fine. |
| Tomatoes | 2 medium chopped fine. |
| Green chillies | 4, cut into 3 pieces each. |
| Coriander leaves | 1 medium sized bunch, cleaned and chopped. |
| The milk of one coconut or a 100 gm packet of coconut powder mixed smoothly into 3 katoris of water. | |
| Haldi | ¼ tsp. |
| Red chilly powder | 1 tsp. |
| Salt | To taste. |
| Sugar | A pinch if desired. |

Method

In a thick bottomed deep pan mix together the onions, tomatoes, green chillies, coriander, haldi, red chilly powder and salt. Mix well, crushing together slightly with the fingers, so that the natural juices mix well together. Place this mixture on a low flame. Since there is no oil or water in this, keep stirring and mashing with a spoon. The onions and tomatoes will soften and release a little moisture. At this stage add the coconut milk and keep stirring until the mixture comes to a boil. Add a pinch of

sugar if so desired.

Immediately remove from the flame and serve hot. This sheere goes well with the Khichadi or even with plain rice.

Roat (Rich aromatic suji cake)

Ingredients

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Rava(Suji) | 1½ Katoris |
| Sugar | 1 Katori. |
| Milk | 1½ Katoris (approx.). |
| Almonds | 10 to 12, blanched, peeled and slivered. |
| Green cardamom Powder | 1½ tsp. |
| Dried dates | Powdered, 4 tsp. |
| Saffron | 12 strands, muddled into a paste in a spoonful of warm milk in a small mortar. |
| Ghee | 1/3 Katori. |
| Baking powder | 2 tsp. |
| Flour | 3 tsp. |

Method

In a mixing bowl, add the rava, sugar and milk. Mix well and allow to stand for 4 hours. Then stir well and add the almonds, cardamom powder, date powder, saffron paste and baking powder. Mix well. Add warmed ghee reserving a little for smearing the baking dish. Allow to stand for 15 minutes. Spread the remaining ghee with your fingers over the base and sides of a square or round baking dish. A Borosil bowl will do. Dust the inside of the dish with flour. Pour the semolina mixture into the baking dish. The mixture should be of pouring consistency. If not, add a little more warmed milk.



rotli/bhakhri/rotlo, rice/khichadi. The sweet dish is placed outside the plate as is a glass of chaas (thin buttermilk). As you sit at the table and begin the meal, the rotlis are served hot and all items replenished as you want them. The idea of spooning different items in katoris (or vadkis), I am told by Hasmukh Shah, former President, Heritage Trust, Baroda, probably goes back to the description of a meal as ‘8 vadki nu jaman’, ‘6 vadki nu jaman’ and ‘4 vadki nu jaman’ (a thali meal with 8 katoris would be a banquet meal). According to the importance of the guests invited to the meal, the presiding housewife would decide which ‘jaman’ to prepare and serve!

The thali as a restaurant product first made its presence felt sometime in the 1970s. I remember eating my first thali at a restaurant called Sabras in Ahmedabad. The restaurant closed but the thali took off like a hot roti (amongst both Gujarati and non-Gujarati families!) and continues to reign as the most popular regional ‘sit-down-served-at-the-table’ buffet. This spawned several me-too thalis in the process – the Punjabi thali, Rajasthani thali, Bengali thali, Periyar thali, and so on. What continues to puzzle me,

however, is why would Gujju families who generally have DBRS (Dal-Bhaat-Rotli-Shaak) almost every day for lunch, want to go out in a restaurant and eat the same thing?

By and large, Gujaratis are vegetarians, though there are also enough communities in the state who are meat-eaters and have developed wonderful recipes with not just chicken, mutton and seafood but also game meat. There is an amazing Eedapak (Egg barfi!) that was demonstrated by an aging Parsi matriarch from Navsari on chef Aditya Bal’s ‘Lost Recipes’ TV show on the Epic channel. But the globe-trotting Gujarati veggie has almost single-handedly introduced world cuisine to the infinite possibilities and flavours of vegetarian food and cooking. Most airlines now offer the ‘Jain’ meal option, unheard of a decade ago, but equivalent to getting brownie points for vegetarianism.

It is common knowledge that Gujaratis are enterprising, business-minded people, willing to take risks and tread into the unknown. Surat and Bharuch on the southern coast of the state, Khambhat at the Gulf of Cambay have been very important trading posts for centuries, with

The Big, Fat Gujju Thali!

Sandhya Bordewekar Gajjar

Every time anyone takes a bite into food in India, the flavor of Gujarat mingles in their mouths. That flavor comes from salt, as almost 80% of Indian salt is harvested in this western-most state. It is no wonder that at dawn on the Hindu New Year’s day during Diwali, salt sellers rush about in every residential area throughout the state, yelling ‘Sabras lo!’ They give a handful of salt crystals in return of ‘baksheesh’ and the housewife switches on the Diwali lights and mixes the salt crystals in her kitchen’s salt jar. This ‘Sabras’, that adds taste to food, also promises

good luck and year-round prosperity to the family.

In addition to salt, Gujarat has given one more culinary jewel to Indian cuisine – the thali. The Gujarati thali offers a complete meal, in terms of nutrition as well as appeasement of the taste buds! It is a visual delight as well – a large metal plate with numerous colourful katoris filled with at least three different vegetables, kathol (pulses), daal/kadhi, raita, and on the rest of the plate, a kachumbar (salad), couple of pickles, chutney and farsan, papad,



business links to merchants from Europe, East Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia. Gujaratis travelled to these countries in search of work and fortunes, took their culinary expertise with them but were also willing to be experimental and accepting of the foods and flavours that they encountered in these countries. Just last year, in Rajkot, I found a tiny grocery store selling all the basic ingredients required for Sudanese cooking popular with the Saurashtra Gujaratis who had lived and worked in Sudan and for some reason have returned to the homeland but crave Sudanese delicacies. For the last few years, the Rander village on the outskirts of Surat has become very popular for the Burmese adapted vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes that were prepared during the Ramzan month. Foodies drove down all the way from Mumbai and Ahmedabad to taste these dishes. A report in the Times of India this Ramzan wrote that the locals are planning to have this popular 'night eats' market throughout the year and not limit it to Ramzan only! It is not for nothing that there is a saying in Gujarati – Surat nu jaman ane Kashi nu maran! (Surat to eat and Kashi to die!)

Since the late 1960s and especially after Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians from Uganda, Gujaratis began moving to the UK, USA and Canada as safer countries for work and often immigration. In the 1980s, Australia and New Zealand were added to these destinations. The popular foods of these regions obviously have dominated the young Gujarati's palate in current times – pizzas, burgers, donuts, footlongs, hot dogs, and with them a range of Tex-Mex stuff like tacos, enchiladas, and what-have-you. Even local Gujaratis, who may not have travelled much, are not averse to trying out new cuisines, even if it means smothering the plate with tomato ketchup if the taste does not go down well. Middle-eastern foods, that share a kind of spicy taste as Indian foods, are a rage, as are the 'desi Chinese' preparations that have nothing even remotely to do with China, except maybe the soy sauce.

Eating out – a concept generally frowned upon in Gujarati households till about three decades back – is now de rigueur. A Facebook page, Food Addicts in Ahmedabad and Foodies in Baroda is one of the most active with followers increasing by the day. Their updates share information about new restaurants, evaluate the fare served on taste, quality, pricing and service, and most recently, with typical Gujju gusto, a debate has been initiated on cheating by most restaurants on calculation of taxes and service charges on the final bill! The page also provides excellent platform for those who want to publicize their food ventures – tiffin services, pop-up kitchens, meal deals, and one of the most valuable, where to get food in the city between midnight and 4 am!

Gujarati cuisine is elaborate, wonderful, and multi-dimensional though a tad on the sweet side. The Kathiawadi (Saurashtra) and Kachchhi cuisines are different in some ways from the mainstream Gujarati but each region has its own magical and mouth-watering range of savory and sweet delights. Let's look at a few here ...

Gujju Fast Foods: The most popular is the Kachchhi Dabeli with roots in the town of Mandvi. A local version of the Vada-Pav, the potato vada is jazzed up with fried groundnuts and a sprinkling of pomegranate seeds! Recent favourites are 'live' dhokla and piping hot 'papdi no loat' (rice flour cooked in hot water, ground green chillies and ajwain, served with a spoonful of cold oil). Certain places have also become popular for specific foods. For instance, Kanjari village in Anand district, is known for its fried patras in the colacosia season! The regular nasta foods such as handvo, muthiya, khaman, khandvi, kachori, and thepla still rule the Gujarati kitchen. Fresh fafda and jalebi continue to be the hottest breakfast all over Saurashtra! The influence of Marathi fast food in Vadodara (as a result of the Gaekwadi influence) can be seen in the perennial popularity of sev-usal for years and in recent times, the



resurgence of sabudana vada and sabudana khichadi served at roadside larries.

Festive Fare: From the month of Shravana to the Holi festival in Phaguna, Gujaratis are almost constantly celebrating some festival or another. Vedmi (puranpoli), laadoo (fried wheat flour patty pounded, mixed with sugar/jaggery and rolled in poppy seeds), garam maghaz (with besan flour), jalebi, dudhpak, shiro are the old favourites while lapsi (made with broken wheat) is a must-have on every happy occasion. Seasonal delicacies such as gulabpak and khajoorpak in Kachchh and adhadiya (from urad dal) in Saurashtra in the winter are traditional and popular, never mind the ghee-induced cholesterol issues.

Rural Fare: In most villages, rotlas made from bajra, maize and jowar are the staple, and khichadi with milk or buttermilk is served for dinner. Breakfast is usually the leftover rotla broken into pieces or the khichadi mixed with buttermilk, salt, turmeric and green chillies and given a tadka with mustard seeds and asafoetida. Totally yum! In urban homes, old-timers still do the same with leftover rotis. This was a favourite with late potter-ceramist Kumud Patel and her sisters and I was privy to a mild quarrel that broke out in her home when one of the sisters polished off the 'Vaghareli rotli' without sharing it with the others! The famous Gujarati undhiya is actually a much simpler rural celebratory and communal feast with the winter harvest of new potatoes, brinjals, beans, sweet potatoes – all lightly spiced with salt, ajwain and oil, and put separately in clay matkas whose mouths are sealed with a local weed growing in the fields. Then the matkas are upturned (hence the name, undhiya), put in a large hole in the ground, covered with hay and given a bhadko. The farmers know for how long to keep stoking the fire till the veggies in the matkas are cooked. The cooked veggies are served on leaf plates and each person has to peel his own veggies, then mash them, pour a little oil and mix



in the fresh chilli chutney and the garlic chutney and eat it. A version of this undhiya, called ubadiya is popular in the winters in south Gujarat and makeshift stalls come up along the entire western highway from Vapi to Valsad in these 2-3 months. Personally, I find it way better than the undhiya!

Darbar Fare: Gujarat was made up of hundreds of large and small princely states. The erstwhile rulers are either Rajput Hindus or Nawab Muslims. They are popularly known as Darbars and their modest palaces are known as Darbargadhs. They are usually non-vegetarian unless they have accepted the Swaminarayan way of life (as has happened with many Darbars in Saurashtra). Many of them were avid shikaris before hunting game was banned so their scrumptious dishes made with venison, partridge, wild boar, hare, grouse are now adapted to mutton or chicken. The Maharaja of Sailana, Digvijaya Singh's classic book, *Cooking Delights of the Maharajas*, has recipes from the Maharaja of Bhavnagar (Mokal Bhavnagar), and from Mallik Saleem Khan Saheb of Dasada (Kofta Saleem),

Wedding Feasts: The worst hit cuisine in the turmoil wrought by the crazy desire to serve a buffet spread of



an unholy mix of chaats and chilli paneer, pasta and pizza, noodles and naans, tawa fry and tindola rice, is the traditional Gujarati lagan nu jaman – with daal and ladoo, vaal (these have completely disappeared, replaced with indifferently made chole or rangooni vaal), flawar-bataka nu shak, puri and shrikhand. This is a really sad story, because this phenomenon is reaching villages too.

Parsi Cuisine: Among the most adaptable and joyous 'immigrants' to Gujarat are the quickly depleting Parsi

community whose ancestors, fleeing religious persecution in Persia, landed on the coast of Sanjan, near Navsari. Hearty eaters, the story of their acceptance is also food-related. The king of Sanjan sent a glass of milk filled to the brim with his minister to the leader of the Parsis. The elderly Parsi looked at the glass and understood what the king wanted to say. He took a spoonful of sugar and gently slipped it in the milk, stirring carefully till it dissolved and sent it back. The king received it, tasted the milk and allowed the Parsis to land and live in his kingdom. The



Parsis have since blended into the Indian sub-continent, sweetening the environment wherever they are, especially if there is an egg around! Broken over a skillet of fried potato or bhindi sabzi, the iconic bhinda par eenda, the delightful akoori (scrambled eggs, the secret being the eggs are broken into cold oil), and the very popular dhansaak (meat cooked with vegetables and a mix of different dals), are Parsi favourites that have made their way into non-Parsi Indian kitchens as well.

Frugal Foods: Like in all regions, there is a range of frugal foods that one looks forward to when not feeling too well, when the rich and spicy fare makes you nauseous, or simply because it is what your mother fed you as a child. The most popular frugal food is the humble khichadi, made with rice mixed different dals and sometimes vegetables too. My friend, architect Nandita Amin, ardent foodie and avid globetrotter, says, “The day I come home from any of my travels, I need to have a meal of simple khichadi and dudhi (the humble bottle-gourd) nu shaak!” But there are other kinds of frugal foods too in the state, especially in rain-scanty regions such as Saurashtra and Kachchh where fresh vegetables may be scarce or expensive. For

instance, my mother-in-law sundried cleaned watermelon peels that would otherwise be thrown away, and stored them for use in place of regular vegetables in the summer. Vegetables that were very cheap in the season, such as cluster beans (gawar), or discarded parts of fruits, such as mango seeds (gotlas) were also dried in the hot summer sun and stored for future use.

Pickle Pots: Pickles are the mainstay of Indian kitchens. They make excellent accompaniments with rotis/rotlas as well as with khichadi, especially in the absence of vegetables, in times of shortages induced by droughts, floods, famines, or when the housewife is too tired to go out and shop for foodstuffs. Pickles in Gujarat use various kinds of fruits and vegetables and can be sweet or savoury or sometimes a delicately balanced mix of both. Pickles are so popular and so widely prepared by almost every household that Gujarat even has a ceramic hub – at Thangadh – to make the cream and brown ceramic, glazed bottles to store the pickles in!

All photographs are courtesy Global Gourmet India.



Sadya - The Kerala Feast for Body, Mind & Spirit

Chef Narayanankutty, Kalari Rasayana, Kollam

Sadya is a vegetarian Kerala feast of varied colours, textures, consistencies & tastes with parboiled rice as the staple. The number of dishes in a Sadya are many and can go up to 65 or more depending on the will of the host to satisfy his guests. It is always served on a banana leaf as per the traditional gastronomic rules and eaten by hand utilizing all the five fingers which are said to be the conduits of the five elements that constitute our body

(Fire, Air, Ether, Earth & Water). Kerala’s Hindu tradition is predominantly vegetarian and their everyday meal also consists of rice with fewer vegetarian curries than a Sadya.

The current lavish form of Sadya was instituted by the 18th century King Marthandavarma of Travancore dynasty who ordered healthy & princely meals for Brahmin priests reciting the Four Vedas (holy books) in 90 days (Murajapa)

as a penance for the lives lost while conquering the nearby smaller Princely States to form the larger Travancore Kingdom.

Kerala had an agrarian tradition and every household was self-sufficient for its food needs. All the vegetables that went into a meal were picked from the garden in the homestead. So, the meal was organic and had seasonal and regional variations. Because there are so many elements in a Sadya, the pickles and crisps, that would last for a few days, were prepared a day or two in advance. Other preparations began at the crack of dawn, so that everything would be ready by lunch time. Sadya feast is only for lunch and dinner is always a lighter meal.

What goes into a Sadya?

The course in a Sadya are pretty standard. It has:-

1. Ozhikkan (to pour, mix and eat)
2. Koottan (to mix and eat)
3. Nakkan (to lick)
4. Maduram (sweet)
5. Kadikkan (to bite)
6. Staple rice and a palate cleanser called olan in between

It starts and ends with dishes that calm the stomach, beginning with a daal (lentil) & ghee, served with hot rice and ending with buttermilk to aid digestion. Salt, pickles, upperi or crisps, pappadam, plantain and the various curries except the pouring curries are laid out on the leaf prior to the arrival of the guest and at room temperature. Rice and curries meant for pouring consistency are served hot when the guest sits down to eat. The pickles (mango, lime, ginger curry and kichdi) and crispies are placed on the left. Then, the other dishes meant to be mixed with rice (Kuttan) and eaten, like avial (a mixed vegetable) and other curries are served in a line along the top half of the leaf. The rice is served on the lower half with pouring

curries, which are daal & ghee, followed by sambar (a lentil-based, mixed vegetable curry). Payasam makes an entry at the last. The meal is rounded off with a little rice and buttermilk /rasam to settle the stomach.

Etiquette of eating on a banana leaf (ela)

Traditional etiquette of eating on a banana leaf, have slight regional differences. Largely, the narrow part of the leaf faces the left, there by the cut side to the right. Sometimes, people will lightly wet the leaf as they sit down for the meal and give it a wipe with their hand. After the meal, the leaf is folded down the middle way from the person. In the olden days, guests used to sit on the floor with crossed legs with the leaf also on the floor or short stools and short tables with leaf on the short tables, but today people find it inconvenient and the Sadya is served at the table. Sitting on the floor and eating helps in better digestion due to an additional blood circulation at the digestive tract. Traditionally, the elder in the house, called a karnavar, would point out to whoever was serving, that a person needed a second helping of a curry or rice.

Healthy and local

Whether it is the feast Sadya or a normal meal it is the vedic wisdom handed over from generations. It encompasses food as nature in its purest form, slow cooked (Mannagni) and eaten slowly with reverence (mindful eating). The Sadya might seem like an overly heavy meal, but it is prepared with local, fresh, seasonal and whole ingredients and is suited to the environment. It is a balanced meal that packs in the six tastes prescribed in Ayurveda - sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent. Since the Sadya incorporates all the tastes, it satiates one's palate and one does not tend to overeat.

Although Sadya is based on the Hindu traditions it is now a tradition by people of all class and creed, depicting the secular character of the Kerala State!

Spices Pattern of Kerala Sadya, Ensuring Predominance to the Original Taste of the Main Ingredient

| Course | Menu | Spices | | | |
|---|------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Ozhikkan (Dishes meant to be poured mixed with rice and eaten) | | | | | |
| | Parippu & Nei | Cumin | Garlic | Green Chilli | |
| | Sambhar | Asafoetida | Tamarind | Turmeric | Coriander |
| | Rasam | Asafoetida | Garlic | Pepper | |
| Koottan (Dishes meant to be mixed with rice and eaten) | | | | | |
| | Avial | Cumin | | Turmeric | |
| | Kurukku Kalan | Fenugreek | Turmeric | Mustard | Red Chilli |
| | Olan | Green Chillies | Curry Leaves | | |
| | Erissery | Green Chillies | Curry Leaves | Turmeric | Pepper |
| | Pachadi | Fenugreek | Curry Leaves | Mustard | Red Chilli |
| | Kichadi | Fenugreek | Curry Leaves | Mustard | Red Chilli |
| | Kootu Curry | Green Chillies | Garlic | Cumin | Red Chilli |
| | Thoran | Cumin | Mustard | Green Chilli | |
| | Mezukkupuratti | Red Chilli | Mustard | Ginger | |
| Nakkan (Dishes meant to be liked) | | | | | |
| | Variety Pickles | Asafoetida | Mustard | | |
| | Inchi Puli | Ginger | Tamarind | | |
| Maduram (Sweet dish) | | | | | |
| | Pal Payasam | Cardamom | | | |
| | Parippu Payasam | Dry Ginger | Cardamom | | |
| | Pazham Pradhaman | Dry Ginger | Cardamom | | |
| | Ada Pradhaman | Cardamom | | | |
| Kadikkan (Crispy dish, meant to be cracked) | | | | | |
| | Sarkkara Puratti | Dry Ginger | Cumin | | |



Khotte

Saraswat Cuisine

Tara. N. Chandaroarkar

The Chitrapur Saraswat Community is a small community of about 25,000 with its own distinct style of cooking. It is not very spicy with the exception of a few dishes. The first attempt to make it into a cook book was made by the late Ambabai Samsi as early as the mid 1930's. She had it completed in manuscript form along with an author's note. Unfortunately she passed away very suddenly in 1938. So it was left to her daughter-in-law the late Kalyanibai Samsi, who with the help of a few other ladies published

the first edition in Marathi in 1943 under the name of "Rasachandrika", followed by an English edition in 1988. In her author's note Ambabai Samsi says: "Since formal academic education has now become more widespread than in my time, girls cannot devote much time to cooking till they are about 20. As a result it becomes very difficult when they first undertake the responsibility of cooking. Under these circumstances Saraswat girls can refer to this book and start cooking typically Saraswat dishes without

much difficulty. Traditional Saraswat cooking is not very spicy and is therefore nutritious and good for health. I have laid special stress on such recipes and methods of cooking".

The next Saraswat Cook book called "The Konkani Saraswat Cook Book" was published with a second edition coming out in 2014. I have enclosed photographs of both the cook book covers. I am also quoting from the author's note written by Asha S. Philar. "As we took the book forward, we discovered that Konkani Saraswat food has a 'whole-earth' approach with its use of vegetables, roots, shoots, leaves, pulses and grain. Peels, pith, flowers and seeds have their place, as do traditional practices of storing food past the season. They represent simplicity, thrift, intentions to conserve limited resources, all of these with an eye to nutrition. The cuisine also has charming departures from the expected, for example a kheeri which is 'cheppi' (non-sweet) and a salad of broken pappads."

SARASWAT RECIPES

(Most recipes unless otherwise indicated, serves about 6)

1. Double Beans Bendhi (one of our few pungent cuisines)

- One cup double bean seeds (you can either cook them in a pressure cooker or just boil with enough water till soft)

- 10 – 15 red chillies
- Tamarind size of a lemon
- Salt to taste
- One tablespoon coconut oil or any other oil of your choice
- Six garlic cloves crushed
- 3 – 4 garlic cloves

Method

Cook the bean seeds - Grind chillies, tamarind, crushed garlic, cloves and a handful of crushed beans to a fine paste - Add the ground paste to the beans with a little water to form a thick gravy - Add salt and bring the mixture to a boil - Heat oil and prepare a seasoning with the garlic and add it to the "bendhi". Can be made with any other bean seeds or dried toor dal soaked overnight.

2. Dali Tauy

- 1 cup toor dal
- 3 cups water
- 2-3 green chillies
- A small piece ginger
- Salt to taste
- ¼ tsp mustard seeds

Double Beans Bendhi



Dali Tauy



- 1 pinch asafoetida
- ¼ tsp turmeric powder
- Few curry leaves
- 1 tbsp ghee or oil for seasoning

Method

Cook the dal with 2 cups water, crushed ginger and slit green chillies in the pressure cooker – Add salt to taste, half of the turmeric powder, remaining 1 cup water - Blend well and simmer again. Prepare a seasoning with ghee or oil, mustard seeds, the rest of the turmeric powder, asafoetida and curry leaves – Add to the dal and serve. Garlic can be used for seasoning instead of mustard seeds and curry leaves. You can add water and make it thinner. Usually served for lunch everyday.

3. Gherkin (Tondli) and Raw Cashew Nut Upkari (Curry)

Tender cashewnuts are sundried and stored. If not available, use ordinary cashewnuts.

- 12 – 15 gherkins cut length-wise
- 1 cup tender cashew nuts soaked in warm water till soft and then peeled
- Salt and gud (jagery) to taste
- 2 tbsps grated coconut



Gherkins and Raw Cashew Nut curry

FOR THE SEASONING

- 1 tbsp oil
- ½ tsp urad (black gram dal)
- ½ tsp mustard seeds
- 4 red chillies – broken into small pieces
- ½ cup water

Method

Prepare the seasoning on a medium flame – add the gherkins and water and cook for ten minutes till vegetables are fairly soft – add the gud and tender cashew nuts and cook for another ten minutes – add salt to taste and cook till all water evaporates – garnish with coconut and serve.

4. Pineapple Sasam (to be served with other curries not as a dessert)

- 2 cups pineapple cubes
- 1 katori kismis
- 1 ball about the size of a lime of Jaggery grated
- Make a paste with ½ grated coconut, 3 red chillies roasted, 1.1/2 tsp mustard seeds (raw)

Method

On the pineapple pieces add gud and salt to taste. After a



Pineapple Sasam



Red Papad Kosambari

while add the paste and serve. Paste must be made with aqua guard or well boiled water.

5. Red Papad Kosambari

Roast or fry red chilli papads, crush them. Mix with some very small thinly sliced onion pieces and a little grated coconut and a few sliced coriander leaves. The proportions can be to your taste.

6. Khotte (makes about 18 pieces)

- 1 cup urad dal (black gram) wash and soak in 2.1/2 cups water for 2 hours
- 2 cups rice – soak for 4-5 hours
- Salt to taste

Method

Grind the rice coarse with a little water - Separately grind the urad dal to a smooth batter by adding enough water to make it smooth and fluffy – combine both batters – the batter should be of a semi-solid slow-pour consistency. Empty the batter into a largish vessel, leaving enough room for the batter to rise – sprinkle one table spoon salt and leave for a little while. The batter should be fermented overnight. Put it in containers – the batter is the same as the idli batter. Next day put it into jackfruit leaf containers and steam. The same process as idlis. You may have to steam them in a large vessel. The idli phode, the little



Kheer with Coconut Milk & Haldi Leaves

round pieces are made by cutting idlis into slices, pan-fry them and sprinkle with any dry chutney powder of your choice. Wet chutney is made with coconut, dhanial leaves and green chillies.

To make jackfruit leaf containers – Take 4 jackfruit leaves and place 2 of them lengthwise with one half overlapping the other. Do the same with the other two leaves and place them breadthwise. Fix the base with thin bamboo slivers. Fold the leaves up to form a cup / container. Fix the sides with the slivers.

7. Rice Kheer with Coconut Milk & Finely Sliced Haldi Leaves.

This kheer called Dhavi Kheer (white kheer) is without any sugar or gud. It is normally eaten with mango pickle. Is a must for the menu on “Gowri Pooja” (one day before Ganesh Chaturti).

- 3 cups rice washed and drained
- 8-10 cups water
- 2 turmeric leaves washed and dried
- 2 cups thick coconut milk

Method

Pressure cook rice with water and turmeric leaves till soft, along with ½ cup of coconut milk and blend in the rest



Sweet Phenori Pastry

of the coconut milk. Cook on low heat for three minutes and keep the leaves and serve warm. If you want to eat it sweet, just add sugar.

8. Sweet Phenori Pastry (Gode Phenori)

- 3 cups maida (refined flour)
- A pinch of salt
- 1 cup milk or water for mixing
- 3 cups sugar -Prepare a thick syrup of one-thread consistency
- 1.1/2 cups water -About 220 degrees F / 105 degrees C
- 1 tsp cardamom powder
- 4 table spoons ghee
- Oil for deep frying

Method

Add salt and milk or water to the maida (flour), rub in half the ghee into the flour mix and make a stiff dough. Divide the dough into equal sized portions (about 20 – 27). Roll each portion into thin rotis. Heat the rest of the ghee. Place the puri on a cutting board and smear it with a little ghee. Sprinkle a little riceflour or cornflour over the ghee. Place a 2nd puri on the 1st one a little further away from the edge ('in staircase' formation). Repeat the process of



Ragi Dosa

smearing the ghee and riceflour on each roti placed. When you have stacked 7 puris in this 'staircase' formation, fold in the sides and fold into a roll. Cut the roll into thin discs about a sixth of an inch thick. Lightly roll out each slice into a thick puri without pressing it too hard. When all the puris for the phenori are ready, deep fry them in hot oil on medium heat. Turn them over once or twice. When the fried phenoris are ready, dip them (about 4 or 5 at a time) in the warm sugar syrup flavoured with the cardamom powder. Coat them uniformly with the sugar syrup and gently shake off any surplus syrup. Arrange them on a large plate to cool and to allow the syrup to dry. Store the phenoris carefully so that they do not break or flake easily, in an airtight container.

9. Ragi Dosa

- 1 small lota (glass) urad dal. Soak for 3 hours, grind fine and keep overnight
- Ragi (red millet) 3 lotas – wash and grind fine

Method

On a large holed strainer, strain ragi putting generous quantities of water so that the skin can be thrown away. Keep overnight. Next morning gently remove water from ragi and mix the remaining ragi batter with urad dal batter. Add salt and make dosas.



The Allure of Rich Punjabi Cuisine

Davinder Kumar

Punjab is a combination word, in Persian, Punjab means **Punj** (Five) and **Ab** (Water). It is the “**Land of the Five**” – the Beas, Satluj, Chenab, Ravi and Jhelum rivers and is also India’s granary- producing more than half of the wheat, rice and millet grown in the country. The fertility of its fields and the richness of its dairy produce are the envy of the subcontinent. The earliest references to the region’s food were made in the ancient Hindu Vedic scriptures more than 3,000 years ago.

Punjab has experienced diverse culinary influences. Its proximity to Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia cultivated a taste for fresh and dried fruits and exotic nuts.

The rich streams of Hindus, Sikhs and nomadic Pathan tribes have, over the millennia, enriched the cuisine and Punjabi people have lovingly cherished and preserved their far-reaching tastes and eclectic cooking traditions.

The Partition of India in 1947 brought unprecedented numbers of Punjabi refugees to the rest of the country, who carried with them the rich diversity of their food. A string of Punjabi roadside restaurants called dhabas sprang up all over the larger cities and mushroomed on every highway. Dhabas started not as a business proposition, but as the refugees’ basic need for survival.

The remains of an ancient tandoor oven have been discovered in an excavation at the Indus Valley. Today, the oven's widespread popularity should be credited to the intrepid and extremely mobile Punjabi people. The cuisine in Punjab is exceptionally responsive to the changing seasons. Winter is welcomed with Makke ki roti and Sarson da Saag.

In 1947, the greater Punjab (British Punjab of 1903) was divided into two Punjab: Pakistani Punjab and Indian Punjab. The North West Frontier Province was also influenced with Bukhara style cooking. Baluchistan and the Province of Sindh also influence Punjabi cooking due to their close proximity.

The cuisine of Punjab has an enormous variety of mouth-watering vegetarian as well as non-vegetarian dishes. The spice content ranges from minimal to pleasant to high. Punjabi food is usually relished by people of all communities and home cooking differs from the restaurant style cooking. In restaurants, the chefs make a liberal use of desi ghee, butter and cream to make the food delicious and finger licking. On the other hand, at home, people prefer using sunflower oil or some other refined oil for cooking, with the basic idea of making the food low in fat content, with minimal usage of butter and cream.

Wheat flour is the staple food of Punjabis; however, they do enjoy eating rice on festivities and other special occasions. When it comes to food, each region in Punjab has an entirely different preference - like people in Amritsar are particularly fond of stuffed paranthas and milk products. The philosophy of life for most of the Punjabis is to eat, drink and be merry. While preparing Punjabi food onion, ginger and garlic are used extensively to enhance the flavours.

Traditional Punjabi thali consists of varied kinds of breads; some are baked in the tandoor such as tandoori roti, laccha paratha, naan and kulcha, while others are dry baked on the tava (pan) like chapatti and jowar ki roti. There is another fabulous variety of roti called rumali roti, which is thinner and larger in size as compared to the normal one and is also easily absorbable. There are also breads that are shallow fried such as parantha and deep-fried such as puri and bhatoora.

Popular Dishes

The food items that form a part of the traditional foods of Punjab are so eye-catching and tempting that you can hardly resist them. Some of the popular delicacies of the State are - Sarson ka Saag, Makki ki Roti, Dal Amritsari,



Choley, Shahi Paneer, Tandoori Chicken, Butter Chicken, Rarha Meat, Amritsari Machli, Kadhi and more.

The local cuisine of Punjab is heavily influenced by the agriculture and farming lifestyle that has been prevalent for centuries. The people in this State generally go for spicy food and use oil and ghee to considerably higher levels. There are no intricate marinades or exotic sauces,

but an exuberant use of masalas, with a touch of pure ghee is what works best.

Punjab is a major producer of wheat, rice and dairy products, which form the staple diet of Punjabi people and the people of Punjab prefer wheat to rice. In roti itself, you find such a wide variety that you are left to wonder how versatile the cuisine is?

Hyderabadi Cuisine

Salma Hussain

It is believed that one of the ways to judge the greatness of a culture is to look closely at its cuisine. Old Hyderabad was famous for its hospitality, generosity and cuisine. Wedding feasts, celebrations and parties were common place and were occasions for people to demonstrate their hospitality. Hyderabadi cuisine today is known all over the world for its special nature and its infinite variety. It has few peers in the sub-continent for sheer range as well as delicacy of taste. Let me list out some of the well-known culinary dishes of Hyderabadi food.

Tutak-Luqmi – (among many kinds of starters), Pasinda Khabab, Sheekh Kabab – Chaal ke kabab – Nargisi Kofta – Shikampur and Shaami Kababs, Biryani Khaam and Biryani Zard/Zafani combined with Dum ke Baingan / Baghaare Baingan, Mirch Ka Saalan, Kulti ka cut. Joban Malti or Maati was another exquisite culinary preparation cooked on special occasions. Several varieties of breads including Baqar khani roti, Mullah dupyaza ki roti, Bibi marium ki roti, Sheermal, Kulcha or Kulecha / Naan. Dam Ka Murgh. Different varieties of Qorma, Sada Qorma, Allu Ka Qorma, Kada Qorma and Jahazi Qorma – different kinds of daalchas, do Pyaazas and Qalias. Worthy of special mention is Sarkari Dalcha consisting of different lentils and Maahi Qalia.

Among deserts many Hyderabadi preparations are popular the world over today. A few typically Hyderabadi desserts, deserve to be mentioned. Double ka meetha, seviyon ka muzafir, maaquti, sheerberanj and dum ki puranpuri are just a handful of names from hundreds of rich varieties which adorned the “Dastarkhaan” of old Hyderabad.

The wealthy and leisured aristocracy of the erstwhile Nizam State as well as the long peaceful years of their dominance, contributed largely to the development of the Hyderabadi Cuisine. Their devotion to the culinary art made it a princely legacy of the Nizam’s of Hyderabad.

Hyderabadi cuisine is an amalgamation of Mughlai, Turkish and Arabic cuisine with a healthy native influence. The variety of ingredients commonly used comprises mainly of rice, wheat, vegetables and meat. Mutton as well as chicken is used for special occasions. Skilled usage of various natural edibles, such as almonds, apricots, walnuts, cashew, coconut, peanut, sesame, poppy seeds and many spices like cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, caraway seeds, red chilies, turmeric, cumin seeds, fenugreek, pepper, coriander, nutmeg, bay leaves, fennel, etc. and many beneficial herbs and flavors make this cuisine identical. It is slightly sour in taste, tomatoes and tamarind is used for the purpose.

A unique procedure of “Dum” is used; it is sealing the dish with dough and gently simmering its ingredients over slow fire to increase the absorption of the aromatic spices. Dum and barbecue are the techniques used for the preparation of mutton and chicken and the food is flavoured by the smoking process.

Mealtime in a Hyderabadi home was not just a routine but also a ritual, a time for celebration. A meal was the grand finale and no guest could leave a Hyderabadi home without sharing a meal with the family.

Modern Hyderabadi cuisine evolved during the period of Nizam’s and elevated to a sublime art form. It is the result of

many innovative technique and many new combinations tried and led by the mastered chef’s (khansamas) of the royal kitchen. Most of the modern day dishes in Hyderabadi cuisine were introduced and invented during the times of Nizam’s and had become an integral part of the Hyderabadi food.

Shahi Dastarkhan was the dining place where food was served and eaten. “Chowki” - a low table was used instead of the dining table and cotton mattresses for squatting and bolsters for the backrest were used.

The herbs and spices used in the dish as well as the method of preparation often give the dish its name. For formal occasions Hyderabadi food is garnished with “warq”, a very fine pure silver leaf created by prolonged hammering and flattening. Some of the dishes, which make Hyderabadi cuisine distinct, are:

Dum Biryani: The most famous meat and rice dish, a traditional celebration and stairway to heaven. An authentic Hyderabadi meal invariably includes biryani of mutton or chicken. Meat is stir fried with spices, marinated with curd and other spices for couple of hours and cooked



with basmati rice (the best quality of rice) using the procedure of “dum” (slow oven). Soaked saffron is used for its aroma and biryani is a must for feasts and festivals.

Mirch ka Salan: It is served along with the Hyderabadi biryani. Coconut, peanut, sesame seeds along with some spices are used for the unique refreshing flavour.



Hyderabadi Haleem: It is a dish made with wheat, meat and pure ghee. Cooked for hours to get the porridge like paste, it has high nutritive value because of its contents, usually served to break the fast in Ramzan.



Hyderabadi Marag: A spicy meat soup, it is light in texture and prepared with tender mutton. It is a perfect starter.



Hyderbadi Nahari Paya: It is prepared with sheep or goat trotters. Paste of nuts and spices are used, then garnished with rich cream and served hot with “naan” or “sheermaal” (soft special bread).



Hyderabadi Kebabs: Is made with minced mutton marinated with groundnuts, spices, etc. and cooked on slow fire or often fried in ghee. There are different varieties of kebabs famous in the Hyderabadi cuisine like boti kebab, nargisi kebab, shami kebab, malai kebab and shikampur etc.



Some of other special Hyderabadi curries include:

Baghare Baigan: made with fresh brinjals, fresh coconut, roasted peanuts, sesame seeds and some other spices.



Gosht Pasinde: Meat and paste of almonds and poppy seeds is used along with rich cream and spices. This delicacy is enjoyed with hot parathas or tandoori rotis.



Tomato Cut: As the name suggests it is made with tomatoes, garlic and coriander. Special spices are added, which gives the real flavor of Hyderabadi food.



Gosht Ki Kadi: It is prepared with meat, sliced onions along with the spices like dhania, jeera and coriander leaves. This delicacy is enjoyed with biryani and rotis.



Malai Korma: The malai korma is relished with extra hint of malai (cream). Tomatoes give some sour taste to the dish and this is served with hot steamed rice or roti's.



Murgh Dopyaza: Pyaz (onion), as the name suggests it is made with chicken and onions along with special spices to give that additional flavour.



Qubuli: This is a special Pulao for vegetarian food lovers. Cooked with Bengal gram rice and pure ghee it is made on special occasions in Hyderabad. Saffron and other spices are used for flavors coriander and mint is used for garnishing.



Jahaji Korma: This is prepared with boneless lamp, yogurt and garlic paste. It is relished with hot steamed rice or rotis.



Raitha: Also called as burhani raita. It is served as perfect combination with biryani, qubuli and all types of pulaos. Finely beaten curd mixed with chopped coriander, mint, onion, green chillies, etc. is used.



Hyderabadi Khichdi: is a famous dish for breakfast. Made with Basmati rice, lentils and pure ghee. It is packed with nutrition and taste. Served hot along with minced meat curry, chutneys, etc. Gives energy for the whole day.



HYDERABADI SNACKS:

Lukhmi: A typical Hyderabadi starter. These are small squares of refined flour filled with minced meat. Served hot with chutneys and savour the delectable flavor.



Osmania Biscuits: The nice soft biscuits got its name after the last ruler of Hyderabad Mir Osman Ali Khan the VII Nizam. These biscuits are served and relished with tea in every family of Hyderabad.

Shikampur: A typical Hyderabadi starter. It is prepared with boneless mutton, onions, garlic and added spices like coriander powder, almonds, ground chirongi and served with chutney.



DESSERTS:

Double Ka Mitha: This sweet is made of Bread, Khoya along with sugar and milk.



Qubani ka Meetha: Apricort is the main ingredient of this sweet dish. Made soft and served in the sugary syrup base, garnished with almonds and cream.



Shahi Tukra: It is also called as double ka meetha. Made with bread and cream it is the most sumptuous dessert with rich taste. Equally delicious when served hot or cold. Garnished with saffron, sliced almonds and pistachios.



Sheer Khurma: Sheer means milk and khurma is dates. This dessert is made with milk, vermicelli and dates. Full of nutrition, it is made on special occasions or festivals and liked by everyone. Garnished with crunchy nuts it has sweet creamy taste and liked by all.



Aamras: This juice is prepared with mangoes, cream along with sugar. The aamras can be relished with pooris.



The list is vast and boundless and very difficult to cover. The most admirable fact about this cuisine is its authentic way of cooking and appropriate usage of its contents.



Mapillah Cuisine

Faiza Moosa

Kerala the Coastal State, 39863 sq km lying in the extreme South of India is a tropical paradise with the green of rice paddies, banana plantations, coconut palms, the blue of rivers and teeming seas. It presents an astonishing array of foods; white rice and coconut are de rigueur in the Malayali menu. There are so many unusual ways of preparing them that your palate is constantly pleased.

Here in Kerala we have three main cuisines. The Muslim,

Christian and the Hindu Cuisine. The North of Kerala about 580km coastline is called by the name Malabar and the Muslims here are referred to as Mopillas or Mapillahs and the cuisine is called "Mapillah Cuisine".

It is said, that within a generation of the prophet's death Islam had reached Malabar. Arab Merchants from Aden, Yemen and Oman were the early conduits through which the faith reached Malabar. They made alliance with local

women and thus, an indigenous Muslim community consisting of those with Arab blood took root in Kerala. They were called Mapillah meaning Maha Pillai, meaning someone held in high esteem. Mapillah also means bridegroom. The local converts too were identified by this name and today roughly 20% of the Kerala population comprises of Muslims.

Malabar cuisine is the synthesis of two culinary traditions. As in the case of newborn where relatives of parents lay claim to this or the family likeness, it is tempting to carry out a culinary DNA matching with the recipes as the genetic code. For E.g. the abundant use of coconut is clearly Malayali trait, but ghee (clarified butter) inveigles its way into Mapillah kitchen. The Arabs used it and they called it Samn. The sheep's head curry and the whole stuffed sheep served at Mapillah weddings is also an Arab legacy. The belief that the food must surprise the eater is the *raison d'être* for many stuffed dishes in the Middle East. In one of the Mapillah recipes a hardboiled egg is stuffed in whole chicken, which is encased in a pillow of dough. The Love of layering – think of Turkish BAKLAVA and the Yemini BINT al SAHN is mirrored in the Mapillah desert called Chattipathiri. So when you look at the Malabar recipes there are overlaps of cultures and kitchen beyond the shores.

The way we eat reflects the way we live and Mapillah cuisine embodies this. It owes its uniqueness to certain foods and certain attitudes towards food. Fasting and feasting are taken seriously. Ramadan, the 9th month of Lunar Calendar is dedicated to fasting and prayers. This is the time when Mapillah women turn their hands to snack making in a big way. Alisa – a wheat potage a common dish also eaten in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon is a Ramadan special dish.

Dinner is meant to fortify the eater for the next day's fasting. This is where the Pathiri rules. Pathiri is a unique Mapillah creation. For e.g. the Podi Pathiri the simplest one is made from rice flour and resembles the North Indian Chappati. It is a very thin griddle roasted circular bread. But Pathiri as a genre displays complexity and diversely not seen in the other breads. Besides rice flour, Pathiri can be made from rice batter, deep fried like poori, steamed, eaten with curry and can be a standalone dish also. All in all there are at least 500 different types of Pathiris.

Though life in Malabar is changing, the matrilineal tradition endures especially in North Malabar. After marriage the women continues to live in her family house or tharavadu with her husband and children. Assured of a roof and financial security she did not have to go out to





work for a living. This gave her the leisure to master the culinary skills. Cooking was a woman's art. Recipes were heirlooms passed from mother to daughter through listen-watch and learn method. The Tharavadu kitchens were big and all the laborious task like grinding, grating and pounding were hired.

In Malabar marriages are mostly "arranged marriages". The feasting begins several days before marriage and during this time the traditional cuisine is showcased in all its glory. The appetizers are numerous and elaborate. At certain times the bread make their entry in a procession of pathiris, flaky wheat porottas etc. along with a flotilla of meat and chicken dishes.

Then follows the Biryani accompanied by date pickle, coconut chutney and raita (a yogurt based relish). Certain dishes are only connected with weddings. For e.g. Alisa-the wheat potage and the mutta maala (the egg yolk

sweet). Wherever there is a Muslim community there is Biryani. Besides Mutton and Chicken Biryani's, Malabar also has unusual seafood Biryani like the Fish Biryani, the Prawn Biryani etc. Arab Cuisine too has seafood and rice combos. Given the fact that it was not Mughals, but the monsoon winds that introduced the faith to Malabar, one wonder if the Malabar Biryani was not a product of the same process of synthesis – foreign cooking styles married to local ingredients – that created the local cuisine.

Everyday Mapillah food is not rich, nor has been, subjected to much experimentation. In the cooking of fish, coconut oil is used. A specialty of Malabar is Kallummakkai (the green lipped mussel that is found along the coast) is eaten stuffed, curried or fried.

As everywhere, in Kerala religion and history serve at the tabletop too, but its character comes from the extraordinary generosity of the Mapillah spirit.

Bhojohori Manna

The saga of rural cuisine

Siddhartha Chatterjee

The story of Bengali food has an age-old history. As Bengal and Assam are in the Gangetic belt, rice cultivation was predominant and that made the locals consume mainly rice (called Bhat or boiled rice). Abundance of water bodies & rivers caused ample supply of various fish-both big and small for the locals to consume. Thus Bengal and Bangalis were branded as consumers of fish curries and rice. To a large extent Kerala also shared the same phenomenon and in both places fish eating culture continues. You cannot stop a "bangali" from talking about fish every day.

Later, the British influence brought in various forms of fish eating habits like fried fish, prawn cutlet, fish coverage

(called kabiraji) mainly using river Bektu and tiger prawns. Thus, these two types of fish got international acceptance, which still continues to be a delight for foodies across the world. The Japanese consumes a major portion of tiger prawns of the Sundarbans. The commoners continued consuming cheaper river & pond fish and made local curries (akin to fish soup), which is still the staple diet. With the advent of scientific methods of farming fish, Andhra Pradesh & Gujarat became large producers of Rohu and Katla fish, which they distributed all over the country bringing in a sea change in fish eating culture.

Till about fifteen years back Bengal and its capital Kolkata

hardly had any good eating places serving Bengali cuisine. There were very few Bangladeshi restaurants on Free School street thronged by the Bangladeshi's. On an up market scale, Aheli (Peerless group) and Qeupies served Bengali cuisine and there were roadside joints also called "Bhater Hotel" but they lacked quality and ambience. This is when Bhojohori Manna was created without much fan fare. It was the brainchild of five friends who had a common passion for food but with no experience in food business. Initially it was decided that few snacky items will be on the menu but that could not generate sales required to sustain any kind of business. Hence some rice, fish & vegetable curries, daal and of course chicken & mutton curries were introduced. Cooking was done exactly the way it was done in any household. People passing by tried the food and they liked it possibly because it was simple. The word spread around and the regular shoppers around South Kolkata shopping area dropped by in the afternoon and enjoyed the food. The little place (18 seaters) on Ekdalia road (South Kolkata) where Bhojohori Manna started, soon got clumsy with paucity of space leading to long ques. Consumer demand led to a slow conversion of simple home style cooking into a slightly more, if I am permitted to say "masaledar cooking". Demand

matrix led to creation of other outlets in Kolkata to cater to consumers closer to their area of convenience. Today we have presence in almost all parts of Kolkata as well as North Bengal (Siliguri) Puri (Odisha), Bengaluru and of course Mumbai.

The cuisine started with some local cooks who went through a trial run before the first restaurant was opened. They did not have the knowledge, which normally a trained chef would have but were great with cooking". They are still with us and hence Bhojohori Manna runs till today without chefs or as a matter of fact any trained persons from the hotel management schools. They are sourced from villages and do not have formal degrees but are great in their "rustic wisdom". In some way we have been indulging in CSR activities right from the first day and also created small time entrepreneurs (mostly village women) who are supplying us semi-cooked food. From very poor conditions, these families now have a decent living.

For our readers, let me present a few Bengali dishes, which could give you an insight into good dining experience. Fish comes naturally at the top of the list.



Kolkata Bekti (pronounced by locals as Bhetki) comes in the form of a whole fish -weighing about 2-3 kg. The fish has one central bone, which if taken out creates a boneless fillet. Depending on what you want to make out of it, these fillets are cut to different sizes to suit different kind of preparations. Most popular would be crumb fried fish (Bhetki Rongpuri as named by us) which goes very well as a starter. The word "Rongpuri" has been coined because of the usage of "ajwain" during the course of marination along with onion & ginger paste. This use, we believe is an

adaptation of culinary skills from "Rongpur"(presently in Bangladesh). This with a dash of "Kasundi" (the Bengali version of mustard sauce) is absolutely a delight for food lovers.

The same betki in another form of a starter called "Bhetki Paturi" is a wonder creation. This is a steamed betki in cube form, marinated with mustard paste and wrapped in banana leaves and then charcoal baked. Paturi is akin to "patrani machhee"(a Parsi will explain you in more

details). The paturi can also be made with shrimps (chingri paturi) or hilsa (ilish paturi).

Bhojohori officially has 55 items in their menu only with fish. Each one has its origin from rural Bengal adapted to suit modern taste but keeping original recipes and spices intact.

Another very interesting fish item is called “Muitha”, an adaption from the delicacies of Dhaka (Bangladesh). It is again boneless “fish cakes” prepared from giant sized fish called “Chitol”, best available in river Brahmaputra. One side of the fish, which has soft bones, is scraped out to take the meat out. The small bones are separated out and the meat is mixed with boiled potato, which acts as a binder.

The dough created is then made into chops and boiled, cooled and then cut into diamond shaped pieces, which is later lightly fried in oil. The curry is separately made using onion, ginger & garlic paste, turmeric powder etc. Once it is cooked, the cakes are put into the curry and served hot. It is one of the finest delicacies. A Bengali son-in-law would be offered “Muitha” whenever he is visiting his in-laws, as it is a delicacy.

The most sought after fish are Tiger Prawns, Hilsa (queen of fish) and Kolkata can boast about the best quality of these in India.

For the vegetarians, it will be interesting to note that around 45 varieties of vegetable dishes are on the menu almost every day at the Bhojohori Manna outlets. Interestingly, there is a huge use of banana items in Bengali dishes. Almost all parts of a banana tree are eaten by Bengali's. The flower, stem and raw banana itself also finds way into Mocha Paturi, Shukto, Kach kolar kofta etc. and can be simply delicious when eaten with steamed rice.

Needless to mention, these delicacies are rich in iron and vitamin. Bengali's use of “Posto”(poppy seeds) in various vegetarian dishes is well known. This particular food is adapted from the district of Purulia, which is situated in Western Bengal and is considered a dry place. Use of poppy seeds leads to drowsiness and incidentally, this is a banned food item in UAE.

Daal (pulses) is also very popular with a Bengali and in almost all cases the lunch or dinner starts with mixing daal and rice. Unlike the North Indian variety, Bengali daal is not thick and is similar to lentil soup. Moong, masoor and chana daals are the favourites. There is an extensive use of coriander leaves and in some cases coconut. Daal is a must in Bengali cuisine. For a detailed menu, log –www.bhojohorimanna.com

Large Corporations & MNCs over the years have tried to introduce products created by them through extensive research & development into the rural parts of India and have been successful in creating a mass market. Thus rural India is now used to biscuits & beverages of western origin. Bhojohori Manna on the other hand has adapted rural food and presented the same in its original form to the urban consumers, which is gaining acceptance by the day. We are still working on adapting more of the village cuisine, employing more rural people and present their skills to the urban population. Our journey to show case Indian food will now enter the international community through our humble entry in Dubai.

Bhojohori Manna is grateful to the publishers for allowing us an entry to narrate the saga of rural food transformation into the urban stream.



Bihari Cuisine

Deepak Gupta

A question that is often asked, “Is there a separate Cuisine? You mean Bihari food is different – not just dal and rice. The next obvious question asked - What is it? The knowledgeable associate it with Litti and Choka, which of course is the most popular Bihari dish.

Unfortunately this land of intellectuals, great masters, flourishing empires and the seat of learning- the Nalanda University is famous today for crime and corruption. The

true Bihar with its amazingly rich culture, history and food is completely submerged having lost any reference to its glorious identity.

In small pockets of Bihar there are still remnants of what constituted the seat of great spiritual and intellectual power. To understand the food of Bihar, it is imperative to understand the history and culture, as the cuisine is an outcome of the influences that people have been through,



not only of the last decades, but impact of centuries. It will be apt to set some context of global influence that has shaped the cuisine of this region.

Bihar's antiquity is evident from its name, which is derived from the ancient word 'Vihara' (monastery), which evolved to Bihar due to the local penchant for all V's being converted to Bh's to match the basic dialect. It is one of the oldest inhabited places in the world with a history of 3000 years. It is a land that is blessed with the footprint of the Masters themselves and subsequently abounds with Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jains, and Sikh shrines. This ancient land also bespeaks of the world's first major empires rise and fall.

The cultural mix and food adventure, with Bihar at the central point expanded as Ashoka expanded his empire. The range of global impact was visible during the Mauryan Empire, when Ashoka, towered over nearly the entire sub-continent and scholars like Megasthenes from Greece, Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang from the east, traversed through

the land and left their mark on the cuisine.

As the flow of the Greeks, Roman Japanese, Burmese, Cambodian, Afghanis', Moghuls and British flowed through Bihar, the cuisine and taste for alternative options evolved to a point that the pasta merged with dal in the same dish! On the other hand some pure delicacies remained as the royalty and generals demanded their favourites. This led to the local Bihari's evolving their palette with no less than crepes, pasta, dim sums, elaborate kebabs, along with the bar-be-que or fried Litti's. Yes, where there is prosperity the sweet tooth will be eclectic and the range of desserts evolved to be exotic and exciting.

Lord Buddha attained his enlightenment in Bodhgaya, which is currently the ultimate pilgrimage point for devotees and tourists. The impact of religion is significant of the region and the Bihari cuisine is predominantly vegetarian. Vegetarian diet leans over to compensate through dairy products, which are a part and parcel of the local household, throughout the year. The common

foods include ghee, lassi, butter, yogurt known as dahi and buttermilk known as mattha. The importance of milk products, particularly amongst the Maithils, is reflected through an old quotation:

“ Aadi Ghee aur Ant Dahi, oyi Bhojan k Bhojan kahi” (A good meal, is a meal that starts with ghee and ends with yogurt).

Breakfast in Bihar is a heavy meal comprising of paratha, poories, sabjee/ vegetables, channa, dhuchka, bhabhra, chhanch- a savoury crepe made from lentils & rice.

The Bihari thali, even today changes every 3 to 4 months, gracing it with seasonal fresh vegetable dishes. There are, however, some constants such as rice, roti, vegetables, achar, chatni, dals and milk products with some variation. The non-vegetarians would add a fish or lamb in addition. A brilliant concept the thali, is popular as it offers a wide range of flavors for the food loving, Bihari palette. The dishes mirror condiments like jeera or panchforan (“five seeds”, namely saunf, sarson, methi, ajwain and mangraeel / Kalaunji) are sprinkled generously across the dishes and for “chhounkna”--“Tadka”(tempering) of some vegetables. Cooking oils opted for would be vegetable oil, mustard oil and loads of ghee.

One very interesting dish in Bihar is called Dal Pithee. This is our Pasta in a Lentil broth! Wheat pasta florets are hand made, cooked in dal & tempered with ghee & jeera. It is eaten with a spicy garlic, potato & brinjal preparation.

One of the most remarkable results of the vegetables being cooked is the turn out of “smoked food”. It refers to using smoked red chilli to infuse a strong aroma in food. It is the same chilli that is used for successfully warding away evil spirits, these Chilli's are available in a regular Bihari Kitchen.



The Turks, Mughals and Romans also left their mark, bringing in the kebabs, biryani and kofte. The play of the meats, chicken and fish with a sprinkling of traditional & local Indian spices took the Indian non-vegetarian cuisine to a different order of taste. Some of these famous food items include Biharee Kabab, Shami Kabab, Nargisi Kofte, Shabdeg, Yakhnee Biryane, Mutton Biryani, Shalgum Gosht, Baqer Khani, Kulcha, Naan, Roti, Seveyee Zarda, Qemamee Seveyia, Gajar ka Halwa and Andeka Zafrani Halwa among many others. This was mentioned by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in his memoirs where the distinctive flavour of Bihari non-vegetarian cooking finds a special mention.

Biharis are quite famous for their Bihari kebabs, which has a very distinctive flavour and is fried unlike other kebabs, which are pan fried or roasted. This dish was traditionally made from mutton and is eaten with roti, paratha or boiled rice.

The region of Champaran was ruled in ancient India by Sirdhwaj Janak, an erudite scholar as well as the temporal and spiritual lord for his subjects. Yagyavalkya was his chief priest who codified the Hindu law known as Yajnavalkya Smriti. Proximity to Bengal and Nepal led to a tussle of years, with the Mughals taking over at one point



and then final fame came when Champaran became the integral part of the Indigo revolt known as the Champaran Satyagraha. This land named after the Magnolia tree boasts today of a famous mutton dish called taash. Taash is a classic combination dish that is made by frying mutton but eaten with Chewra, The taash inside a parantha, gets promoted to be called a Bihari roll making it an odd but very appetizing dinner.

This Sub Himalayan tribal region in the North has a unique style & repertoire impacted by the tribal & the rivers. The Sone, Gandak and the Ganges, supplied an endless supply of fishes like Rohu, Katla – a variety of carp, Singhara, variety of cat fish, fresh water prawns, crabs and small fishes. As eons of cultures passed by, fish recipes were exchanged and changed over thousands of years, with the fish curry cooked in mustard paste with rice (maaach-bhaat) triumphing to this date. The villages and towns by the rivers lean towards fish with their preferred food being Macha Jhor famous in Mithila as well. While fried fish is popular, the Kekra Chokha prefers to be roasted and then

mashed to prepare a crab (Kankor) dish.

Bihari food would not be complete without mentioning Pittha a special food of the Anga region. This is Bihar's answer to the dim sums of the East. I would guess that the Buddhist & the scholars of the East left some impact on this style of cooking. It is a unique dish prepared from rice flour stuffed with savory chana dal, It is then steamed / cooked in boiling water. Pittha can be made stuffed (sweet or salty) or unstuffed. It is then sautéed in ghee and jeera with salt & black pepper.

Litti Choka is synonymous to Bihar & has global recognition. Sattu is mixed with onions, garlic, ajwain, kala jeera, and pickle. This is then stuffed in wheat dough, which is salted and flavored with ajwain & laced with ghee. This is roasted on slow heat & served with potato or vegetable mash like hash-browns. This style of cooking & food is found in Rajasthan & even Australian Aboriginals have something similar.

The Bihari meal whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian is trimmed with accessories. These can be crisps made out of lentils, poshto, sago, innumerable chutneys, papads – roasted/ fried or pickles. What makes this interesting is the combinations that emerge – rice and dal with mango pickle and a handful of salted bhujia thrown in and mixed or some rice, coriander chutney and onions topped with ghee.

Festivals and events like marriages are a big deal - Chhath Puja, Teej, Durga Puja, Kali Puja and Diwali. Chhath Pooja is one of the major festivals of Bihar, when devotees of Sun God fast. On the last day of the festival, the fast is broken by consuming the Chhath prasad. Sweets like Kheer, Thekua [wheat cookies] & fruits are offered as prasad to the sun god by the river bank.

Thekua- a wheat home made cookie is quite easy to make:

500 gms whole-wheat flour

300 gms Gur (Jaggery)

4-5 green cardamom - peeled and mashed

Ghee (or Vegetable Oil)

1.5-cup of water

Make a mix of jaggery, water and green cardamom. Add 4 tbsps ghee to the jaggery syrup prepared above and mix it to the flour and make a hard dough out of it.

Take a small piece of the dough, press it flat against your palm and then press it on a cookie mold for making thekua. Once the thekua has acquired the imprint of the mold, deep fry it in ghee till it gets reddish brown. Filter out the ghee and put them aside. Allow the thekua to cool down and serve.

Bihar offers a large variety of sweet delicacies, which unlike those from Bengal, are mostly dry. Worthy of



special mention are Tilkut, Khaja from Silao, Peda from Deogarh and Anarsa from Gaya for their popularity. Another interesting desert is Khubi Ka Lai, born of the Ganges every year when it floods. A special kind of weed covers the banks and the seeds are extracted from this abundant weed. These are roasted, de-seeded and small fluffy tasteless minute popcorns come out of these black seeds. These are then mixed with Khoya and nuts and made into white round balls called Khubi Ka Lai.

The Bihar Cuisine would remain incomplete without a reference of Paan (betel leaves). Bihar truly thrives on paan. It may have begun due to its antiseptic properties that freshen the breath and acts as a digestive. However, today it is like most foods taken for its taste. The first reference of the paan is as early as two thousand years ago, in a book 'Mahawamsa' of Srilanka. The Vedas too refer to paan being the first offering to the guru ensuring its sacred and venerated status.

This respectful status is further confirmed by an old Bihari saying Paan, Maach and Makhana (betel leaves, fish and lotus seed) is not even found in paradise, implying- enjoy what you have now on earth and not regret it later!



photographer - surkhab shaukin

Where Food is Loved and Shared Punjabi Cuisine

Geetika Kalha

“**Punjabi Dhaba**” or “**Sher- e- Punjab**” road side eateries can be seen throughout the country. This is the most, recognised and trusted brand in India. It stands for good, fresh, hot, vegetarian food served with warmth and gusto. The Dhaba has made “Punjabi food” synonymous with “Indian food”. Every restaurant in the country serves Punjabi food.

It all began with the partition of India in 1947. One of the most lucrative and easily available occupations for the Punjabi refugees was that of a driver – of trucks and taxis. This required them to travel throughout the country on very low budgets. Seeing a business opportunity other Punjabi refugees opened roadside eateries to cater to the need for rest and food of these drivers. These eateries

were called “**Dhabas**”. They served home style meals to the travellers. The menu was a simple Dal and a seasonal vegetable, served with fresh green chillies and onions, accompanied with tandoori roti. The food was served on a Manji (string cots) with a wooden plank in the centre that served as a table, after a hearty meal the plank was removed and the weary traveller could sleep on the same cot.

The Dhaba were responsible for spreading Punjabi cuisine throughout India. Today the daal makhni, palak paneer and tandoori roti are standard items on the menu in all restaurants serving Indian food anywhere in the world. Some 5 star hotels have restaurants called ‘Dhaba’ in their hotels.

The earliest references to region’s food are found in the Vedas, which documents the lives of the Aryans in Punjab. Amazingly the elements mentioned over 6,000 years ago are still extant in this cuisine. This includes dairy-i (milk), ghrith (ghee), dadhi (curd), shak (leafy green vegetables) and a variety of lentils and grain. Even today, these are the staple in Punjab the unhusked mash is the mother of all lentils. Rajmah derives from the word raj mash or the regal mash.

Punjab-this side of the border or that-is situated at the crossroads of the Silk Route. Caravans of goods and food stuff have arrived in Punjab since Harappan times. Proximity with Persia, Afghanistan and China and Central Asia, has had a huge influence on the eating habits of the Punjabis. It gave them a taste for rice, fresh and dried fruits and exotic nuts. It is said that Kabuli or large Channa reached Punjab with Alexander the Great’s troops who came to Punjab via Afghanistan.

Amritsar, which was the commercial capital of North India prior to partition, had traders from the entire Central

Asia frequent its bazaars. As these traders did not have homes in Amritsar they were forced to eat out and several eateries opened in the city which specialised in catering to a variety of palates. Even today it retains its reputation as the gourmet capital of India.

The most recent influence on Punjabi cuisine was that of the Mughals who brought with them the tradition of the great tandoor, ghost (mutton/ lamb) rice pillao, musk melons, saffron, anardana, (dried pomegranate seed) khas, (poppy seed), gulab sharbat and a host of other foods and flavours. They converted the simple Punjabi fare to a sophisticated cuisine, considered one of the best in the world today. The British brought apples and potatoes and began their cultivation in hills of Kulu district.. The Punjabis continue to add foreign elements to their food. Button mushrooms being the latest to show up on the menu, these were introduced to Punjab in the early 70s.

Punjabis lay great emphasis on Dairy produce. Cow milk is used for drinking and buffalo milk is used to make dahi (yogurt), which when churned is made into chaach (buttermilk) and makhan (white butter), which when heated is made into ghee (clarified butter). Milk is also split to make a cheese called paneer. When the whole milk is cooked slowly the top surface forms a thick skin which is harvested to be used as cream (malai).

Punjabi food revolves around milk products, no meal is complete without their generous use. Warm cow milk is usually had at night before bed. Dahi and chaach are had daily at lunch. Dahi is often whipped into a raita by adding salt, cucumber, mint, onions or any other combination. Dahi is also used to make creamy sauces such as Kormas and Kadi. Paneer is cooked in gravies and sauces and is a key part of the daily menu. Gobs of makhan are used to top breads (roti) or dals and saags to enhance the flavour. Ghee is used as primary cooking –fat or shortening. Malai



photographer - surkhab shaukin

(cream) is often added to enhance the flavour of sauces. The famous dal makhaani contains generous amounts of ghee, butter and cream.

Wheat is Punjab's staple grain, it is ground finely to make Atta or flour. It is made into un-leavened bread (roti) on top of a griddle or tava and eaten daily with meals. The roti is often stuffed with mashed vegetables then basted and fried to make the famous Punjabi parathas. Atta is also deep fried into puris and bhaturas eaten mostly for breakfast with a potato or chickpeas curry. When cooked in a tandoor the atta is made into naans, tandoori rotis and kulchas. In winter makki roti or corn bread is eaten with saag (mustard leaves puree)

Rice is very popular in Punjab, but unlike the rest of India it is never eaten plain boiled. In Punjab rice is always served tempered with cumin seeds, caramelised onions and other spices. It is often eaten as pillao made with mutton, peas, or the outstanding gucchi (morrel). On special occasions the sweet, spice and saffron rice loaded with dry fruit (meethe chawal) is usually the star attraction.

The most popular beans in Punjab are mah dal (black matpe) , rajmah (red kidney bean), channa dal (split small chickpea), kabuli cholay (large chickpea), rongi (black eyed beans) and moog dal. Whole beans are soaked for a while, often overnight and then cooked in water on low flame for a few hours till the mixture becomes creamy. It is then tempered with caramelized onions, tomatoes, garlic, ginger and garam masala and other spices.

Irrigated by five rivers, a large variety of fruits and vegetables are grown throughout the year and form part of Punjabi cuisine. Punjab consumes a variety of pickles and preserves. Famous are the mango pickle, the black lemon pickle, the gobi shalgam (cauliflower and turnip) pickle, galgal (hill lemon) and ginger pickle. Carrot preserves (murabba) are a must have winter dessert, amla

(Indian gooseberry), apples and ginger are also made into delicious preserves. . Black carrots are fermented with water to make the very unique Punjabi drink called kanji.

The traditional fuel for cooking in Punjab is cow dung cakes (paathis). This provides low heat allowing the food to cook slowly; it also adds a smoked flavour to the food which enhances the taste. The paathis are used in chullas (stoves) made of brick and clay.

The tandoor arrived in Punjab with the Afghans during the Sultanate period. In the Mughul period it became a standard fixture in the kitchens of the aristocracy. The tandoor is not part of any Punjabi kitchen, but a common tandoor was often found in Muslim villages where the ladies would bring the atta and get their (roti) bread made for a small payment. This tradition died out with the partition of India. The tandoor is now used in restaurants or whenever there is need to cater to a large number of people. The tandooria is skilled in making naan, kulchas, roti, roast eggplants, legs of mutton and chicken. it is a highly sought after skill.

Some of the iconic dishes which are exclusive to Punjab are : makki ki roti and sarson da saag, pindi chole and bhature, rajmah and jeera chawal, aloo parantha or gobi parantha served with curds, poori chaane with lassi (sweetened butter milk), tandoori roti and dal makhani, tandoori chicken, butter chicken, kulcha chana, kanji, dahi wale laddoo, wadi chawal, matter paneer, palka paneer, rau di kheer and meethe chawal.

The Punjabi's believe that a mother's love can be tasted in the "churi" she makes for her children. Churi is a small roti on which 3 or 4 heaped tablespoons of powdered jaggery (shakkar), with a generous amount of ghee is added and all three are then kneaded together with finger tips and lots of love, to make the sweetest simplest dessert. In Punjab a good wish is often responded to by saying "tere

moh mai ghee shakkar” (may your mouth be filled with ghee and shakkar).

Food is the most important part of all celebrations in Punjab, be it weddings or festivals. Festival food is often different from the daily fare. In the peak of winter the festival of Lohri is marked with much joy and singing around huge bon fires. This festival is celebrated to thank God for surviving the winter and to seek blessing for a good harvest. Special food such as gajak, reyvari, peanuts with jaggery, puffed rice and sesame seeds are made on this occasion. These are all first offered to the fire with prayers and then served to family and friends. A special desert is made during this festival – rau di kheer (sugar cane juice rice pudding).

The festival of Baisakhi marks start of the new year (desi year, is named after king Vikramaditya and starts in 57 B.C is celebrated with anaarse – small round pancakes made of rice flour, sugar, milk , deep fried and garnished with poppy seeds.



The festival of Basant Panchmani celebrates the onset of spring. The pleasant weather brings out the kite lovers and the sky is filled with multi coloured kites battling to cut the other’s kite string. While the men indulge in aerial sorties, the women dress in yellow and prepare yellow coloured food such as, saffron rice, biryani and jalaibeas. Festivals give Punjabi’s an excuse to indulge in their favourite sport – eating.

No discussion on Punjabi cuisine can be complete without the mention of “ **Langar**”. In Persian the word langar means – ‘an alms house’ or a shelter for the poor and needy. In the 12th and 13th century AD, it referred to a kitchen attached to Sufi centres or Dargha, which fed all those who visited there. In Punjab this tradition was started by the Sikh Gurus and is now an essential to the concept of Seva (service) in Sikhism. Guru- Ka- Langar is a community kitchen run in the name of the Guru, it is usually attached to Gurudwaras all over the world. The ingredients are brought and cooked by volunteers who recite prayers while preparing the food. When preparing and serving the food, strict standards of hygiene are maintained. The meal consists of dal without tempering and roti (called parshadas), some langars add a vegetable to the menu on special occasions. The sangat (community) sits on the floor in lines and eat together; there is no distinction of class or caste. No food is allowed to be wasted, everyone finishes their food and cleans there thalis (plates) before leaving.

In the 20th and 21st century the Sikhs have taken the langar to all places where humanitarian relief is required. Be it earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons or train disasters, they are the first to set up a langar and start feeding the traumatised disaster hit community.

The langar is a true reflection of Punjabi cuisine. In Punjab food is wholesome, it is loved and it is shared.

Traditional Cuisines of Tamil Nadu

M.G. Devasahayam, HART Ambassador, Tamil Nadu

For centuries Tamil Nadu has been dominated by the Dravidian culture. The cuisine of Tamils therefore is distinctly different from that of the north, which is primarily wheat-based. The classic foods of Tamil Nadu center around rice and lentils with liberal use of coconut. Though equally balanced between vegetarian and non-vegetarian delicacies, Tamil food is better known for its mouth-watering and piping hot idlis and dosas, which have now become all-India favourites and popular in many parts of the world. Both these are made from a fermented batter of ground rice and lentils. For idli, the batter is steamed into small puffy disks while dosa batter is spread thinly on a griddle and cooked into a crispy crepe/ pancake type of a dish. Both dishes are traditionally eaten with coconut chutney and sambar, a thick soup of lentils, tamarind and vegetables. These are pure vegetarian.

A Tamil meal is traditionally served on a banana leaf, with each dish placed in a particular spot on the leaf



and designed to be eaten in a certain order, with specific combinations of the dishes mixed together with the fingers.

Before eating, a small portion of each food is set aside in the upper corner as an offering to God. Meals are taken seated on the floor, and traditionally, the host continuously replenishes any food that is finished until the diner folds his or her leaf in half. This tradition is fast vanishing.

The best Tamil food is prepared at home by women who have learned the secrets of every dish and spice mixture from generations of mothers and mothers-in-law. Amma in Tamil means mother and even the most highly trained chefs can’t quite duplicate the complex mixture of knowledge and love that an Indian Amma puts into her meals.

Though varieties of Tamil vegetarian food are spread throughout the state with its flavour spreading to neighbouring Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the most popular cuisines are invariably non-vegetarian. Among these the, Chettinad cuisine takes place of primacy though there exist equally traditional and delicious cuisines- Kongunad and Nanjilnad.

Seafaring Chettinad cuisine

The famous Chettinad cuisine is the traditional food of the banking and merchant Chettiyar community who made the areas of Ramnad, Karaikudi and Madurai their home centuries ago. Returning from their travels abroad, the Chettiyars brought back home with them the flavours of the Far East, from as far as Burma.

No Chettinad meal is complete without meat, especially chicken, lamb and prawns. These meats are marinated in masalas ground by hand to create aromatic and spicy dishes. Chettinad cuisine is replete with dried meats, kept in the sun to tide over the harsh dry summer months. These dried meats are then cooked gingerly with oil and doused with masalas comprising precise amounts of aniseed, fennel, cumin, pepper, cinnamon and cloves.

“Chettinad food has a lot more meat in it than the Nanjilnad and the Kongunad cuisines,” says culinary expert Jafar Sadiq. “The key is in the use of spices as far as Chettinad food is concerned,” he adds.

Beyond Chettinad...

Tamil Nadu is a multitude of geographical distinctions, as far as culinary expertise and tradition goes. As the coast and the hills exist side by side, their food too intermingles in a heady aromatic blend that leaves the food lover gasping for more. Chicken Chettinad might well be the hot favourite in restaurants across the state but Tamil Nadu’s cuisines are not just about the Karaikudi variety of spicy, tangy masala-filled aromatic dishes. The foothills of the Western Ghats in the state as well as the southern shores lapped by the lazy waves of the Arabian Sea too have distinct cuisines of their own. These two regions are not known for usage of too much spice. The influence of Kerala is evident, as both of these regions fall along the border of the neighbouring coastal state. Welcome to the lesser known, but equally delightful cuisines of Kongunad and Nanjilnad.

Kongunad –Food of the Western Ghats

Kongunad refers to the area along the western regions of Tamil Nadu – the areas surrounding Coimbatore, Kangayam, Tirupur, Pollachi, Salem, Erode and Namakkal. The soft-spoken Kongus make a variety of dishes equally soft on the palate. Some of the most

popular dishes being Vazhaipoo Vadai (deep fried lentil balls with banana flower), Makka Chola Vadai (deep fried lentil balls with corn), Kongu Kaalan Varuval (mushroom fry), Pallipalayam Paalkatti Varuval (similar to panneer fry), Kongu Thakkali Rasam (tomato soup), Murungai Keerai Rasam (soup made with leaves of drumstick tree) and Pollachi Thengai Kuzhambu (golden brown coconut gravy cooked with badam nuts).

Kongu food is synonymous to the coconut. Most dishes in Kongunad cuisine have coconut in some form – be it roasted and made into paste or freshly grated coconut or even coconut milk. Sesame seeds, groundnut and roasted turmeric are essential ingredients of the Kongu kitchen. These are then stirred together with coconut oil and fresh chicken or lamb to create mildly spiced, aromatic dishes that are easy to eat and digest.

Unlike the Chettinad version of dishes, Kongu cuisine uses only fresh meat. No marination is done beforehand and dried meats are seldom used. This brings a heady and fresh taste to the various dishes cooked in the western belt of Tamil Nadu.

“Kongunad cuisine is milder, more nutritious and they use a variety of locally grown cereals like millets, ragi, black gram and horse gram.” says culinary expert Jafar Sadiq, Managing Partner at Jacob’s Kitchen, a popular chain of restaurants in Tamil Nadu which serves up delectable, little known Tamil fare. Sadiq and his late partner Jacob Sahaya Kumar traveled and researched little known traditional cuisines of Tamil Nadu for 14 long years. “Chicken and mutton are more popular since the area is not very close to the sea.”

Kongunad cuisine is also a reminder of the historic foods of the Tamils of western Tamil Nadu. Millets are used extensively, giving a flavour of the earth at the foothills of the Western Ghats. Tamarind too is used liberally, an anti-

oxidant, that grows in abundance in the area. A plethora of pulses and cereals are used in almost every signature dish of the Kongunad region. Cashew nuts and almonds are soaked and ground into creamy paste, forming the base for thick delectable gravies that are eaten with millets and coarse rice.

A specialty of the region is the Navathania Soup (soup made of nine grains). This combines millets, corn, ragi, wheat, black gram, horse gram, green gram, chana dal, field beans, pepper, coriander and curry leaves to bring a tasty and healthy soup to the table.

Kongu desserts are an absolute treat to the foodie. Local ingredients are used innovatively to create sweets that simply melt in the mouth. Palmyra and coconut form the base for many sweets exclusive to the Kongu region of the state. It is impossible to resist the Pathaneer halwa (sweet dish made of palm fruit juice) and Elaneer Payasam (sweet kheer made of tender coconut) which are a couple of famous and mouth watering specialties of the Kongu belt.

However, if you are a vegetarian, do not fret. The Kongu region grows and supplies fresh vegetables to the rest of the state as well as to neighbouring states. Fresh leafy greens, mushrooms, corn and carrots are locally grown and when added to the famous cashew based gravy of the region, bring out the bursting flavour of the land.

Cuisine of Nanjilnad, the Land’s End of India

While the most popularised variety of Tamil food is indeed the Chettinad style, the Nanjilnad cuisine is distinct for its taste and its breadth of dishes. Populated by the Nadar and fisher-folk communities, Kanyakumari region’s proximity to neighbouring Kerala has brought in a taste of the western coast in its food as well.

The people of this region speak both Tamil and Malayalam

fluently. Their lifestyles too are shared, with hard work and excellent education being the hallmark of the Kanyakumari native. Fishermen head out to fish in the Arabian Sea at daybreak and at nightfall, they return with fresh catch of tuna, salmon, sardine and the locally beloved pomfret. Fish is the staple here and residents of Kanyakumari add seafood to almost every gravy and dish in their menu.

Coconut too is another staple, like in the Kongunad cuisine. The gentle swaying of coconut and palm trees of Nanjil landscape forms the perfect setting for a mildly spiced, nutritious food, rich in protein and fibre. Ginger, green chillies and garlic bring out the fresh flavours of locally available ingredients, creating heady concoctions hard for the food connoisseur to resist. “Since the Nanjilnad food is heavily influenced by Kerala, the taste is mild and lots of vegetables are added along with fish in the food,” explains Sadiq.

These dishes of fish and coconut are accompanied by the Kerala variety of rice. This rice is thicker and harder in texture than the traditional rice of Tamil Nadu. This reddish brown rice is steamed in water and the starchy broth left behind is consumed as an accompaniment to the meal. Beef is eaten in these areas, another influence of the neighbouring state of Kerala.

The Ulunthuchoru (rice and black lentils) is not to be missed when you head to the coasts of Kanyakumari. This is one of the traditional Nanjilnad dishes and is served in accompaniment with Varuthu Araicha Thovaiyal (roasted coconut chutney). Aviyal (stew) made with egg and fresh vegetables as well as Kerala’s famous Pappadam (papad) add to the high protein value of the tasty meal.

A speciality of this region is the variety of tapioca, rich in carbohydrates which can double as staple food and sweet-dish and is good for making chips. Tapioca pearls are referred to as “Javvarisi” in Tamil and most of the

delicacies are cooked from this form of tapioca. During the famine of the fifties the poor in this region survived on tapioca as staple food.

One of the few spicy stews in the Nanjilnad cuisine is the Vendhaya Kuzhambu. Made of fenugreek, this thick aromatic stew is spicy and perfect with Ulunthuchoru, the preparation of rice and black lentils. Theeyal is also a trademark dish of this cuisine, consisting of vegetables in burnt gravy.

In the desserts department, Nanjil cuisine outdoes itself. Try the Kinnathappam, a traditional dessert literally meaning 'plate cake', a signature dish that natives of Nagercoil love. Made of white rice and coconut milk, kinnathappam bursts with nutrition and carbohydrates. Its cousin is the Elayappam, literally translating to 'leaf cake'. A mixture of rice flour, coconut, jiggery and spices are wrapped tightly in plantain leaves and steamed. Other festival delicacies are crisp and crunchy Achu Murukku and Mundhiri Kothu made of rice-paste, lentil and jaggery combination.

In sum, as is their language and culture, food of the Tamils is also ancient and rich. As they say 'variety is the spice of life'. Tamil Nadu lives it to the full in its mind-boggling, spicy and mouth-watering cuisine of main dishes, side-dishes and desserts. These are to be tasted to be believed. Herewith are visuals of some select dishes across the cuisine:

A. Chettinad

1. Chicken

A fiery curry, combining the tanginess of tomatoes, the sweetness of the onions and cinnamon and the heat from red chillies.



2. Mushroom

Made with mushrooms, this recipe is boldly spiced with tamarind, coconut, chillies



3. Fish Fry

Fleshy surmai fillets are wrapped in an exquisite Chettinad masala paste and then pan fried.



4. Mutton



5. Palkatti

Velvety cubes of cottage cheese are bathed in a gravy made with mustard seeds, urad daal, curry leaves, onions, tomatoes



6. Paal Payasam

A kheer-like dessert made with milk, rice, nuts and cardamom.



B. Kongunad

1. Everyday Thali (Veg)



2. Everyday Thali (Non-veg)



3. Nilgris Chicken kuruma



4. Varuthu Aracha (roasted and pasted) Mutton Curry



5. Poondu (garlic) curry



6. Kachayam Sweet



C. Nanjilnad

1. Pomfret fish fry



2. Fish Curry with Drumsticks



3. Vegetable Aviyal (mixed-rice)



4. Ulunthu soru (Urud dhal rice)



5. Tapioca in different shapes and tastes



6. Achu Murukku and Mundhiri Kothu





A large variety of pots at VEECHAR

Heritage Cuisine Utensils and Styles of Cooking

Anil Bhandari

Indian cuisine is diverse and the use of exotic spices imparts to the preparations, fantastic flavours, enticing aromas and tantalizing tastes. Indian cuisine, like the rich cultural heritage, also possesses a 5,000-year-old history and a wealth of heritage.

Indian society is multicultural and multifaceted and the

manifold regional culinary varieties enrich the diversity of the cuisine making it increasingly popular all over the world.

Each region has its own cuisine and style of preparation. Cooking utensils play an important part in the preparation process. Down the ages, pots and pans discovered by

archaeologists and now housed in museums possess immense heritage value. Made of clay, metal, alloys and also stone, they were used in the preparation of cuisines during the reigns of prominent empires and dynasties and reveal interesting details of the blending of that period's culinary habits, agricultural production, economy and infrastructural progress.

Excavations at the Indus Valley, one of the oldest and at that time a highly developed civilization in the world indicate that around 1500 B.C. the Aryans entered India. Over the ages, India witnessed the rise and fall of several empires - the Mauryas, the Guptas, the Slave dynasty, the Mughals and Sikh rulers of the North, the Marathas of the West and the Cholas, Pandyas and Cheras in the South.

Starting from the 15th century onwards ships carrying Portuguese, British, French and Dutch traders started arriving in India. The British later colonized and ruled over India for about 200 years till 1947 when India gained Independence.

Tracing cooking utensils with heritage value would necessitate tracing their origins. The Bronze Age on the Indian subcontinent began with the Indus Valley civilization. Inhabitants of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa developed techniques in metallurgy and produced copper, lead, bronze and tin. Artisans produced a wide range of utilitarian and decorative objects using specialized techniques of stonework, ceramics and metallurgy. Copper, bronze and shell were used to make utensils.

Pottery or ceramic ware of the era was heavy and fine clay was used in making smooth surfaced vessels which were then painted in black over red. Coarse grey ware was meant for rough use such as cooking. The surface of the vessels was rough, coarse grey and decorated with incised designs.

Wheat and barley were the main food crops grown by the Indus valley farmers. Peas and dates were also grown. Cattle, goats, sheep provided milk and meat. Food was cooked on hearths and grain was ground to flour by rubbing a rounded stone across on top of a flat stone. Bread and porridge were part of everybody's diet. Commoners thrived on vegetables and fish and the rich ate poultry and game.



Brass pot of the Indus Valley civilization

During what is called the Golden Age of India, that is, the Mauryan and Gupta Empires, during the 320-550 BC, pots and pans recovered from that period reveal that a high degree of skill and perfection was reached in the preparation of clay utensils, which were popular in daily domestic use. Influences of Buddhism, Jainism and later Islam affected food habits of the people. Even the rock edicts of Ashoka supported the benefits of vegetarianism but the utensils in, which they were prepared, were not mentioned.

From the Mauryan Empire to the frequent invasions by Turco-Mongolian marauders into the country from around the 10-11th centuries and prior to the establishment of the Mughal Empire, Vasco Da Gama arrived in India in 1498 leading to colonization of parts of India by the Portuguese. As with other cuisines, Indian cuisine absorbed the new-world vegetables such as tomatoes, chilies' and potatoes.

The Mughals (1526-1857) introduced Mughlai cuisine to India, the influence of, which spread from Kashmir and Awadh in the North to Hyderabad far down in South India. The cuisine was different in each region but it was rich, aromatic and spicy. The cooking utensils used, that is the degch or degchi and handi were common as these

were used in the preparation of traditional North Indian cuisine.

While the British were in India till 1947 they introduced a cuisine of their own. Anglo-Indian cooking was almost a culinary balancing act of local ingredients and foreign tastes. Mulligatawny, kedgeree, Indian curry powder and Worcestershire sauce are all products of the British Raj. The pots and pans used by the bawarchis cooking for the British were of Indian origin.

We learn from history that not all food was cooked in utensils. The hordes of Mongols invaders who came in search of riches to India chose to eat while in the saddle. They gorged on chunks of meat roasted on hot slabs of rock or on skewers over logwood fires as they did not find time to cook regular meals. From the 13th to the 16th centuries, the armies of Chengiz Khan, Taimur Lang and Babur were compelled to travel long distances on foot, horses and camels to reach India. Those roasted chunks must have tasted like today's barbecued steaks minus the sauces.

There were other forms of unconventional cooking which are prevalent even today. The Patthar ke Kebab owe their origins to the erstwhile nawabi era of Hyderabad. Marinated lamb is cooked over a patthar (stone). A black granite stone about half-an-inch thick is heated over a bed of hot charcoal and the meat is cooked on the stone.

Another form of an "outdoor" kitchen is the khad (deep pit) style of cooking of Rajasthan. When hunting wildlife was not considered a violation of animal rights, members of the royal family would set out on a shikar. The big game would be carried back to the castle by coolies, minor shikar such as wild boar, teetar (partridge), bater (quail) and rabbits were lunchtime fare for the hungry hunters in the jungle.

In the khad style of cooking large leaves and mitti (wet earth) were used in lieu of a utensil. The heat source at the base of the pit was by burning charcoal covered with dry twigs and cow dung to provide the heat. The marinated shikar was tightly wrapped in the leaves, which were then coated with mitti and placed in the pit which was then covered with sand. After a passage of time the pit was dug up, the dried-up mitti crust was broken and the deliciously aromatic preparation, cooked in its own juices, was ready to be eaten. The Khad khargosh is prepared today on special occasions replicating those shikar days.

The Kashmiri preparation of Gushtaba and Rishta involves the pounding of pieces of boneless mutton along with the fat with a wooden mallet on a wooden block overnight till the strands of mutton split and the mutton turns into mince which is used to form koftas.

Since centuries cooking utensils have been made out of different materials and defined shapes based on the dish to be prepared in them, style of cooking, temperature required and source of heat. Utensils of different eras were based on the local and regional agricultural produce, which was governed by the environmental surroundings such as climatic conditions, supply of water and quality of



A typical kitchen of the 18-19th century. The tradition of using wood-fired stoves and metal utensils is followed by some villagers for their daily cooking.

the soil. Manmade influences included religious traditions, community taboos, caste distinctions and prevalent zaika (taste).

All these factors combined to define the cuisine of each generation, their cultural milieu, social philosophies and economic standing. Although cuisines, recipes, ingredients and styles of cooking differed from region to region, there was not much of a difference in the conventional designs of the utensils.

A reflection on the socio-economic system that prevailed in India centuries ago was that shelves of royal kitchens and the upper classes were agleam with silverware. Intricately worked serving dishes made of gold, silver and base metal belonged to those classes. The metals were believed to impart purifying and healing properties to the food.

Terracotta kitchenware was for ordinary people. In common use in the clay-rich areas of the Indo-Gangetic plains of the North, these sun-baked vessels were environmentally-friendly. They were ideal for preparing dishes over even heat. Cooking in earthenware vessels imparted a unique flavour to the food.

Those living in the eastern, western and southern regions used utensils made of various metals and alloys, the areas being mineral rich. Another reason was that they did not break as easily as pots and pans made of clay. Cast iron cookware is heavy, doesn't rust easily. Food cooked in them enhances the iron content of the food benefiting those with iron deficiency.

Aluminum was introduced in India in the earlier 1800s. Affordable, light and strong, it was a good conductor of heat but not a good cooking alloy as contact with strong acids, alkalis and salt from food caused the metal to dissolve. Peetal (brass) is an alloy of tamba (copper) and zinc, while bronze (kansa) is an alloy of copper and tin.

Copper and brass vessels react to acids and salt and can cause food poisoning. Therefore they must be coated with kalai (tinning) regularly.

Just as bronze disappeared during the 1950s, brass and copper utensils have also been replaced with stainless steel cookware. Superior conductors of heat, they are rarely seen in kitchens today as they wear out easily and require kalai frequently. Till the 1960s the kalaiwallah was a regular visitor to all homes to bring a shine to the utensils. Popularity of stainless steel drove him out of business.

Copper is still used to clad the exterior of stainless steel cookware for heat conduction as stainless steel is not a good heat conductor. Some cookwares use a sandwiched layer of aluminum at the base for uniform heating. Such vessels are called heavy bottomed.

Cooking utensils retained their original shapes even when the material used in their manufacture kept changing. Down the ages recipes and tastes have changed, culinary preferences and perceptions kept shifting but the conventional shape of the utensils has not altered.

The type of utensils used in Indian kitchens for cooking depends on the dish to be prepared, ingredients and the style of cooking. A selection of cooking utensils includes:

DEGH / DEGCHI: Not usually seen in modern-day kitchens, this brass vessel with a spherical base tapering sharply from the middle and ending in a narrow opening allows steam to condense and roll back into the food. Ideally used for the traditional slow-cooking process today known as the Dum Pukht style of cooking.



Degchi used for Dum cooking

HANDI: A spherical clay pot along with a lid, this utensil is used for cooking Dum Biryani over a slow fire, and for preparing curries requiring low heat. The handi has been used for centuries and has been handed down from one generation to another.

PATEELA / BHAGONA: A circular vessel made of brass or stainless steel. It has straight walls and a narrow brim and is used to boil milk or cook many types of dishes.

KARHAI: A shallow wok with a round base. Traditionally made of copper or brass, it has generally been replaced by stainless steel. Deep frying, sautéing and making dry preparations are done in the karhai.



Karhai for frying and gravy preparations

CHAKLA & BELAN: The dough for chapatis is rolled out on the traditional chakla, a round board, and belan, a rolling pin.

TAVA: A round thick iron griddle with a slight concave in the centre, it is a must in most Indian households. Used for making rotis, chappatis and parathas.

SIL BATTA: The sil is a flat stone and the batta a cylindrical grinding stone. Used pan-India, having different names, these grinding stones are used to prepare chutneys and spice mixes for cooking in the North, East and West and to grind soaked lentils in preparation for dosas and vadas by South Indians.



North Indian sil batta

TANDOOR: A cylindrical clay oven with thick walls to retain the heat generated by burning charcoal at the base. Used for roasting or baking tandoori rotis, vegetables, paneer (cottage cheese), marinated mutton and chicken.

BAGHAR: Small frying pan with a long handle, used for giving tarka (tempering) to dals and vegetables.

BOTI (chopper), CHULHA (stove), CHAKKI (wheat grinder) have no utility in modern urban kitchens designed for stand-up operations. These are commonly used today by villagers in the rural belts of India.

Museums are repositories for preserving a community's heritage and identity. They serve to propagate a way of life that existed in the pre-industrialization days and provide a window to look into bygone eras, where royalty enjoyed manifold luxuries, when simplicity was part of rural life.

The National Museum in New Delhi, Lothal Archaeological Museum, 80 km from Ahmedabad and the British Museum in London have galleries with Indus Valley civilization artifacts and terracotta.

A museum that has been preserving heritage cooking utensils is the Vishalia Environmental Center for Heritage of Art Architecture and Research (VECHAAR) in the vicinity of Vishalla Village restaurant in Ahmedabad.

Brainchild of architect Mr. Surender C. Patel, it was built in 1981 and has more than 3,500 Indian pots and pans



Display of utensils at VEECHAR

that were crafted by local potters. Some of the utensils on display are more than 1,000 years old and include other kitchen-related memorabilia such as pots, pitchers, nutcrackers and betel boxes.

VECHAAR is an extensive collection of utensils that have evolved over different periods of history as a result of changing needs and the environment. The range of items varies from plates made of leaves or a gourd jug to modern stainless steel and glass utensils. Metal utensils include those made of brass, copper, bronze, zinc and German silver.

The museum, listed as an "Attraction" on the Gujarat Tourism website, is an effort to cherish and preserve India's rich cultural heritage and rare artistic skills of our craftsmen.

In Pune the Raja Dinakar Kelkar Museum, founded in 1920, displays household vessels of the 18th and 19th centuries. The vessels, made of terracotta, copper and brass, were brought from Kerala, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Kitchen-related equipment includes copper ovens, spice boxes, coconut slicers, metal plates, spoon hangers, etc. in different shapes and sizes.

Much can be learnt about a people, their recipes, cooking process and tastes from their cooking utensils. Ancient pots and pans, a slice of life of the times they were used in should be given a place in museums in all parts of the country.

I suggest that small museums, such as VECHAAR in Ahmedabad, be developed in other states. The Ministry of Tourism needs to take the initiative in preservation, maintenance, conservation and promotion of India's culinary heritage.

For a beginning, the first museum could be opened in the Indian Culinary Institute which will begin operations in 2016-17. The Ministry also needs to organize, as part of the research in Indian regional cuisines, documentation of the vessels in which specific dishes were prepared. This will help develop aesthetic awareness among the people and encourage them to seek newer tastes through ancient cooking practices.



Painted terra cotta cooking pot from Harappa



Assortment of kitchen utensils

A Brief Glimpse of the Mathur's and their Cuisine

Preeta Mathur

“Eat, drink and be a Mathur”, was the catchy title of a long article on the Mathur community that appeared in the popular illustrated weekly in the 1960's. Though apt the statement is at best partly true, Mathur's, one of the 12 branches of the Kayastha community, have since times long gone by, been well known for the high level of intellectual and cultural accomplishments. In recognition of this, Mathur's found themselves highly sought after and respected as ministers, generals, judges, administrators, lawyers and doctors. Their close proximity to the royal dynasty took them to the far corners of the country from Kashmir to Bengal to Hyderabad, where they settled down as highly respected members of those societies. In addition to all these refinements, another very progressive trait of the Mathur's that has been that women have been well educated, highly respected and talented singers, artists and culinary experts. The community has throughout time shunned socially reprehensible practices like dowry and other social abuses pertaining to women.

With an open minded and positive attitude, it took little time for Mathur's to adapt to local conditions wherever they migrated to with royal founding dynasties and to absorb local languages, customs and cultural influences. This impact is clearly visible in the cuisine popular among Mathur households in different parts of the country.

An outstanding example of this integration is the Hyderabad Mathur's. A few families were part of the founding entourage of the Nizam dynasty. Ever since then, Mathur's have held high and influential positions

in successive courts of the Nizams and to date carry the title of 'Raja'. Today, when Mathur's of the North meet their Hyderabad brethren the comparisons are just as remarkable as the contrasts. Their cuisine reflects the dominant local impact of the strong preference for chillies. Well known Mathur preparations which went to the Deccan with the old families have returned with distinctive characteristics of their own like Garley (deep fried minced balls dipped in gram flour batter), Tootak (non veg baked kachouris) and Lukhmi (stuffed small pillow shaped savouries).

Similar, is the position of the old settled Mathur families of deep west Rajasthan around Jodhpur and Bikaner. My husband Viresh, who studied in Mayo college, Ajmer tells me that the food habits, the language spoken by these families are more akin to the locals than to Mathur's from Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. On the food front 'Soolas' are a popular preparation which consists of succulent, boneless pieces of chicken and lamb which are barbecued. The Soolas are first marinated with raw papaya and kachri to tenderise them. Then 'dhangar' (smoking) is given by placing 2 live charcoals in a small steel bowl. This is placed in the middle of the marinated meat. 2 cloves are placed on the cinders and 1 tsp ghee is dropped on them. When it starts to smoke it is covered with a lid. The smoke thus trapped inside incorporates with the meat, giving it an exotic smoky flavour.

Major festivals like Holi, Dussehra and Diwali are celebrated by all Mathur's wherever they may be located.

Amidst, great joy and conviviality among large family groups with plenty of food, drinks and music. Holi has been traditionally been associated with the preparation and serving of Papri, Goojas and Kanji ke Bade.

Most Mathur families can trace their roots to several preceding generations. Accordingly, different families have nuanced and typical ways of observing different socio-religious ceremonies. In the same vein, different families were well known for different food preparations. Since these were handed down from one generation to another the custodians jealously guarded them. Needless to say these rare culinary gems were hardly ever committed to paper and were handed down by word of mouth and over kitchen fires. Mathur cooking is distinguished by the subtle blending of aromas, flavours, and cooking techniques, most notably 'bhuna', 'dum' and 'dhungar', which are sublime forms of culinary art.

Some of the exotic Mathur dishes are Shabdeg in which meats and vegetables are simmered overnight in a pot over charcoal fire, Siri where goats head is cooked in exotic spices and Daulat ki chaat, a delectable winter dessert of whipped milk foam chilled in the nights stew.

In Delhi, the traditional Mathur strong holds were the lanes and by lanes of Chandni chowk, Nayi sadak, Chira khana, Daryaganj and Jamna road. The famous Chuki matar (succulent tender whole green pea pods cooked in tangy masala) and Aloo ke kulle (boiled scooped potatoes filled with sprouts, pomegranate seeds, chat masala and lemon juice) are very popular.

In Uttar Pradesh, the small and only Mathur princely state of Daryabad near Lukhnow is celebrated for its exquisite and unique cuisine and in special snacks called 'Phale' which are stuffed wheat flour savouries, tampered with whole red chillies and fenugreek seeds. A typical

Mathur preparation Bari Bauwa Ki Handi is an earthy flavoured chicken preparation, cooked without onions, in a new earthen pot/handi. The pot gives the chicken a unique earthy fragrance and flavour. Another popular vegetarian dish is 'Takke Paise'- a relative of Gatte ki Sabzi. It is a versatile dish with a deft play of ingredients. Lovely Mathur adds soaked and pureed dried figs, Geeta Shankar adds carom seeds and kachri and my mother used a portion of prepared masala and yogurt while kneading the gram flour. Potli pulao, Yakhni pulao, Matar ki Tahiri and Ramchane ki tahiri are popular rice dishes.

Since the Mathur's love for good food is a unique trait it would be interesting to note that some Mathur ladies who were vegetarian could none the less produce the most delectable non vegetarian preparations. A case in point is my own mother. Though a vegetarian, her Pasandas (artfully beaten pieces of boneless lamb), roast leg, dum fish and patila chaap (lamb chops) were to die for even though she never tasted the preparation. Similarly, my aunt in law cooked a unique melt in the mouth Raan which took 3 days of pounding, grinding, marinations and slow fire cooking before being brought to the dining table.

My maternal uncles, a leading family from Patiala were great hunters. I recall most wistfully my childhood visits to my maternal home in Patiala where I vividly remember my uncle emerging from his mud splattered jeep in his shikaar outfit with shoulders drooping from the weight of guns and all kinds of game meats. This was followed with much bustle of cutting, marinating and cooking of the game meats by family members among noisy scenes of laughter, shikaar anecdotes, drinking, singing and massive eating.

The Mathurs zest for life makes them one of the unique communities of our country.

INTACT RECIPES

YAKHNI/POTLI PULAO

Potli pulao is cooked like yakhni pulao. In potli pulao, a selection of aromatic spices is tied in a muslin cloth like a bouquet garni (potli) to prevent them from dispersing into the yakhni (stock) while boiling. The spice potli releases flavours which get incorporated into the lamb stock. The bouquet garni is squeezed to pull out the flavours and then discarded. In yakhni pulao, the spices are boiled with the meat and later strained.

Ingredients

For the yakhni (stock):

- 1 kg Lamb, chops, neck, leg (the bones make the stock thick and juicy)
- 1 Onion, large, roughly chopped
- 1 whole Garlic (lasan) pod
- 2 Black cardamoms (badielaichi), lightly crushed
- 8 Cloves (laung)
- 10 Black peppercorns (sabut kali mirch)
- 1" Cinnamon (dalchini) stick
- Salt to taste
- For the rice:
 - 4 cups / 800 gm Basmati rice, soaked in water for ½ an hour, drained in a colander
 - ¾ cup / 150 gm Ghee
 - 2 Onions, large, thinly sliced
 - 1 tbsp / 24 gm Ginger (adrak), finely chopped

- Whole garam masala:
- 2-3 Bay leaves (tejpatta)
- 2 Black cardamoms
- 6 Cloves 6 Black peppercorns
- 1" Cinnamon stick ¼ tsp Cumin (jeera) seeds

Method

1. Boil all the ingredients for the yakhni with enough water to cover about 1½". Pressure cook for 20 minutes or till the lamb is ¾th done.
2. Strain the yakhni and keep aside. Keep the lamb pieces and discard the spices and residue after squeezing them.
3. Heat the ghee in a pan; golden fry the sliced onions. Reserve half for garnishing. In the same ghee, add the whole garam masala and saute.
4. Add the drained rice and sauté for 4-5 minutes.
5. Add the boiled lamb pieces and ginger; saute.
6. Pour the strained stock. Adjust the seasoning and water. Cook on low heat.
7. Sprinkle fried onions and serve.



PASANDA

Ingredients

- 1 kg Lamb pasanda
- 2 tbsp / 30 gm raw papaya paste
- Salt to taste
- ½ cup / 100 gm Parched gram, roasted, ground
- 1 tsp / 3 gm Red chilli powder
- 1 tbsp / 6 gm Coriander (dhaniya) seeds, roasted, ground
- 2 cups / 500 gm Yoghurt (dahi)
- 1 cup / 200 gm Ghee
- 1 kg Onions, half finely sliced and half finely chopped
- 2 Dried kachari, ground with a little water
- 2" piece Ginger (adrak), ground
- 1 whole Garlic (lasan) pod, peeled, ground
- ½ cup / 30 gm Mint (pudina) leaves, chopped
- ½ cup / 30 gm Green coriander (haradhaniya), chopped
- 1 tsp / 3 gm Garam masala powder

Method

1. Rub the raw papaya paste and salt on the pasanda and let it sit for 1 hour. Mix the ground parched gram, red chilli powder, and coriander powder with the yoghurt. Keep aside.
2. Heat the ghee in a pan; lightly golden fry the sliced onions. Add the kachari and mix well.
3. Add the meat and cook till it is half cooked, for about 40 minutes.

4. Add the chopped onions and saute.
5. Add the ginger-garlic paste and mix well.
6. Mix in the mint leaves and green coriander. Now, gradually add the yoghurt mixture. Cover and let it simmer on low heat. Put live coals on the lid and cook on dum (simmer) on low heat.
7. Serve hot sprinkled with garam masala and green coriander.



PHALE

Ingredients

- 250 gm Husked black gram (dhuliurad dal), soaked in water for 2-4 hours, drained
- a pinch Asafoetida (hing)
- 1 tsp / 3 gm Coriander (dhaniya) powder
- 1½ tsp / 4½ gm Red chilli powder
- 1½" Ginger (adrak) piece, finely grated

- 1 tbsp / 4 gm Green coriander (haradhaniya), chopped
- 4 Green chillies
- 500 gm Whole wheat flour (atta)
- 1½ tsp / 4½ gm Salt

For the tempering:

- 4 tbsp / 60 ml Mustard (sarson) oil
- 2 tsp / 9 gm Fenugreek seeds (methidana)
- 3-4 Whole red chillies (sabutulalmirch), each broken into 2 pieces

Method

1. Coarsely grind the black gram in a grinder. Add the asafoetida and coriander powder; mix well.
2. Add the red chilli powder, ginger, green coriander, and green chillies; mix well. Keep aside.
3. Mix 1½ tsp salt with wheat flour. Knead the flour with water to form a firm and soft dough (puri-like dough). Divide the dough into walnut-sized balls. With wet hands take a ball of the flour dough and spread it on your palm.
4. Cup your palm and fill it with 1 tbsp of the lentil mixture. Press the fingers over the palm thereby sealing the lentil mixture inside.
5. Grease an open wide pan and pour 3 cups of water and boil. Place the phale in the boiling water for 5 minutes. Turn the phale and boil for further 10 minutes. Make all the phales in a similar manner. Remove onto a plate and keep aside to cool. With a sharp knife cut each into 3 pieces.
6. Heat the oil in a wok (kadhai); add the fenugreek seeds and whole red chillies, saute.
7. Add the cut phales and fry for 10 minutes till evenly brown.

8. Serve immediately with green chutney and garlic red chilli chutney (see note).

Note: For garlic red chilli chutney: soak 6 whole dry red chillies in water for half an hour. Peel 2 whole garlic pods. Grind both the ingredients together with salt to taste. Add 1 tbsp mustard oil and juice of one lemon. Mix and serve.



BHARVAN MURGH

Ingredients

- 1 kg Whole chicken, skin removed, washed, pat dried
- ½ tsp / 1½ gm Red chilli powder, fresh
- 3 tbsp / 12 gm Green coriander (haradhaniya), chopped
- For the stuffing:
 - 12 Almonds (badam), blanched, cut into slivers
 - 1½ tsp / 4½ gm Poppy seeds (khuskhus), dried, roasted, ground with little water.
 - 2 tbsp / 20 gm Priyale seeds (chironji), lightly roasted, pounded coarsely



- 1 tbsp / 10 gm Coconut (nariyal), desiccated
- 1½ tbsp / 15 gm Raisins (kishmish), fried
- ½ cup Whole milk fudge (khoya), crumbled, lightly roasted
- 1 Onion, medium-sized, chopped
- 1" piece Ginger (adrak), chopped
- Salt to taste
- Lightly fried in 1 tsp oil and ground together for the stuffing:
 - 4-5 Cloves (laung)
 - 1 Black cardamom (badielaichi), seeds only
 - 6 Black peppercorns (sabut kali mirch)
 - 5 Green cardamoms (chotielaichi), seeds only
 - ½ tsp Mace (javitri)
- For the gravy:

- 3 tbsp / 45 gm Ghee
- 2 tbsp / 36 gm Ginger, freshly ground to a paste
- 2 tbsp / 36 gm Garlic (lasan), freshly ground to a paste
- Salt to taste
- ¼ tsp Saffron (kesar), soaked in 2 tbsp warm milk
- 3 tbsp / 30 gm Almonds, blanched, ground to a paste with little water
- 3-4 tbsp / 45-60 ml Cream, lightly beaten.

Method

1. Prick the chicken with a fork and lightly rub the inside of the cavity with salt.
2. Mix all the ingredients for the stuffing together including the fried and ground garam masala.
3. Fill the chicken cavity with the stuffing. Do not pack the stuffing as it expands while cooking.
4. Close the cavity with toothpicks or sew with needle and thread.
5. Apply red chilli powder and green coriander and leave aside for 10 minutes.
6. Meanwhile, heat the ghee in a skillet; lightly sauté the ginger-garlic paste. Add the chicken and saute till one-quarter cooked (15-20 minutes). Any leftover filling can also be added. Add the salt, saffron mixture, and almond paste; mix and cover. Sprinkle water whenever required. Turn the chicken and cover again. Add the cream and let it simmer on low heat till the chicken is done.
7. Remove the toothpicks / thread and serve hot.



Indian Pickles and Palate

Rattan Capoor

The evolution of humans as modern social beings is in a strange way inextricably linked to the history of pickles. More precisely, the art of pickling and its less appreciated role and contribution to the development of modern humans. Let us go back in time to the age of the advent of agriculture, some 8,000 to 10,000 years ago. Homo sapiens were beginning to settle after some 150,000 to 190,000 years of foraging for food as hunters and gatherers

much like our cousin apes, thanks to the discovery of our ability to grow food by planting seeds. That was a defining moment for humans, as it changed the fundamentals of living. Now, unlike before, we had food security! It was not before another 4000 years later that humans, in the part of the world called India, started pickling. This discovery of being able to preserve food, for out of season use and more particularly for long journeys enabled not only

far greater food security but enhanced humans ability to undertake longer and farther journeys and became a critical ingredient for the spread of humanity when we became seafarers.

Pickles also provided a source of vitamin C necessary to prevent scurvy. It would be fair to say that, were it not for pickles, Christopher Columbus might never have “discovered” America. In his 1492 voyage, Columbus or more precisely Amerigo Vespucci (a well-known pickle merchant) gave rations of pickles to sailors to prevent them from getting scurvy, leading them to complete their voyage.

Pickling itself has had its own evolution. From a position of being a vital technology for food security it has refined into an art form.

India, also suffering from extreme temperatures, not producing sufficient vegetables in summers, facing crop failure due to excessive rains or draught, long and cold winters killing crops due to frost, all lead to fermented food or pickling as a necessity.

Indian pickles, as we understand them today, are all about taste. The use of the regional term for pickles in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Assamese, Sindhi and Punjabi, “Achar” creates in every Indian an instant expectation of a virtual barrage of contrasting yet complimenting flavors bursting on the palate triggering waves of serotonin in the brain. An Indian can never be said, to be a true Indian if his system does not demand Achar as a regular fare. It is a tribute to this special food that we define ourselves in terms of the kind of pickles we relish. While the common thread that unites all Indians is the famous Mango achar, I am likely to be from Andhra if I like Ghongura achar, a Benarsi if my favourite is spice stuffed Red Chilli pickle, a Gujarati, if I like my Gur Kairi (Young mangoes with jaggery) or Chhunda (sweet jaggery grated mango pickle with

spices) and an Assamese if I love Jolphai jola aru mitha aasaar” made with Indian olives.

The greatest custodians of our pickle heritage have traditionally been our grandmothers. The repertoire of grandma’s pickle in most households is diverse and unique. In many ways it’s a family heirloom. In an U.P Khattri household, to which I belong, is known for the Khattri Achar and we our proud of having at least 50 different varieties of pickles ranging from “ caronda achar, lasoda achar, hing Ki Kairi, mitha khuchla, Aam achar or kathal achar, it’s almost mandatory to have at least five to six different kinds of pickles on the dining table.

Our baptism in pickle takes place very early in life. From early childhood Indians are exposed to the exploding flavours that will stick to them for the rest of their lives. For me, the sweet “gudamba” (jaggery mango) pickles that have a surfeit of fennel seeds in it with rice and Daal (lentil) was an early favourite. As my palate matured, I started to love the pungent hing (asafetida) mango pickle in two variations, the truly sour version and the sweet and sour version. Like an explorer, I discovered that these pickles go really well with homemade crisp mathri, another Khatri favorite snack.

The kathal achar tastes best when eaten with Paranthas. But Jackfruit is seasonal, like many other pickles such as lemon pickle in winters, mango pickle in summers, vegetable pickles in mild winters etc.

One of the most exotic achar is called the Mango Gilori. The large sized raw mangoes are de skinned, traditionally by an improvised de skinning “sepia”(a natural sea shell with a hole in the center and rubbed against a stone to make the cutting edge sharp). Then, with a lot of dexterity, thin layers of the mango would be peeled, so that from a single mango a long piece of a thin layer of mango slice is obtained. Then, a specially prepared masala that has



To document the gastronomical tradition of this land, I visited Bada Rawla in Juni, Indore, the home of Rao Raja Rao Shreekant Zamindar and his wife Madhavi, descendants of Rao Raja Chaudhary Nandlal Mandloi, who established the city of Indore in 1716.

At Bada Rawla, I had the opportunity to taste and photograph some of the common and some uncommon delicacies, which grace the kitchens of Malwa homes. The first thing that strikes you as you look closely at the multitude of dishes made here, is a predominance of food grains- be it bajra (millet), jowar (sorghum), makka (maize) or genhu (wheat). Cereal is cooked in whole, processed and semi-processed form, alone or in combination with other cereals, in sweet as well as savoury form. It forms

the base of the traditional breads of Malwa- bafla, bati or the more common roti. In villages, wheat is soaked overnight and boiled in the morning to create a healthy munching option called ghuggri, which can be eaten sweet or savoury. Similarly, no festival big or small is complete without sweets made out of gur (jaggery) in combination with one or more cereals. Gur ki thuli is a kind of porridge made of broken wheat and gur is especially consumed on the occasion of Renuka Chaudas. Gaakar is a kind of caramelised hard biscuit made of roasted wheat flour and gur that is offered as Prasad in pujas associated with the Goddess and Lord Ganpati.

Being primarily agrarian, the people of Malwa follow their customs and rituals fondly and keep close track of the changing seasons. The climate is mostly dry throughout the year, but the rainfall is very heavy. Added to that, the volcanic, clay-like soil of the region requires less irrigation because of its high capacity of moisture retention. In light of such conditions, most people store their food grains and pulses for use through the year while seasonal vegetables are available fresh throughout the year. Because fresh, locally grown vegetables are plentiful, Malwa has an interesting culture of making seasonal specialties. Every season - summer, winter and the monsoon has distinct delicacies that are enjoyed only at that time of the year and not otherwise.

A typical snack of Malwa is the bhutte ki kees - made with grated corn, mustard seeds, plenty of chilies and lemon juice. In a sweet variation, it is also made with grated corn roasted in ghee and later cooked in milk with spices. It is a hearty and healthy comfort food served steaming hot on wet monsoon days. To make it perfectly, the locally grown makka, or maize should be young and the grains should be soft and doodhia (milky). They should, in short, be harvested after the first rain shower. If by chance, the kees is made with ripe or dry corn, it loses its characteristic flavor and consistency.

Bhutte ki kees

A typical recipe for Bhutte ke kees would be:

Ingredients

- Grated Corn 1 and 1/2 cup
- Gram flour 2 tablespoons
- Green chilies 2 chopped
- Asafoetida a pinch
- Turmeric powder 1/4 teaspoon
- Mustard seeds 1 teaspoon
- Cumin seeds 1/2 teaspoon
- Aniseed/saunf powder 1 table spoon
- Red chilli powder 1 tea spoon
- Salt to taste
- Sugar 1 teaspoon
- Lemon juice from 1 lemon
- Coriander leaves (for garnishing)
- Oil/ghee 2 tablespoon

Method

Grate corn cobs and set aside. Heat oil/ghee in a pan. Add cumin seeds and mustard seeds to it and allow them to splutter. Add Asafoetida and Gram flour to it and stir continuously for 2 minutes. Now add Grated corn, green chilies, salt, sugar and turmeric powder. Mix well and cover the pan with a lid and cook in slow flame for 3-4

minutes. Stir the mixture and cook again for 5 minutes. Add aniseed powder and red chilli powder. Mix well and turn off the flame. Add lemon juice and chopped coriander leaves. Serve Hot.

Similarly, in summer, the mango season is much awaited. From March to June, as the temperature rises, the mango trees start to fruit. The kachchi kerri (young unripe mango) is harvested and used in multifarious ways. Amolya is a sweet-sour dal made with tuar and kachchi kerri. The kerri is also used to make various kinds of chutneys, kachumber salad (assorted vegetable salad) and a special kind of vegetable called fajita. To make fajita, the pulp from the seed of the kerri is extracted and washed in water or milk. It is then tempered with heeng, zeera, curry leaves, salt and chilli powder. This is a unique dish not found anywhere else, as is Rasaan, an astonishing preparation of rice cooked in freshly squeezed sugar cane juice. This is a traditional Malwi dish that has all but disappeared, even in villages.

Winter has its own typical food rituals. Chana (Garbanzo beans or chick peas) is sown at the onset of winter. A Malwi folk legend says that chana should be sown when the air is cold enough to solidify ghee. Fifteen days after sowing, young shoots bearing tender leaves emerge and these are then used to make chane ki bhaji, a winter delicacy. Another typical wintery Malwi dish is gwar-pata ki bati, (bati made from wheat flour and aloe vera) commonly eaten to ward off aches and pains associated with the winter months.



Traditional Malwa food has elements of Rajasthani, Gujarati and Maharashtrian cuisine, and this is very evident from the overwhelming use of tempering agents—sesame, desiccated coconut, curry leaves and mustard seeds that have found their way into dishes made in most households. Centuries of Maratha rule have led to puranpoli and shreekhand being sweets that are found in households across the region. However, besan ki chakki (sweet made of gram flour) and nakti ke laddu (Boondi laddu) are the dishes that are to be found in any religious ceremony or celebration or wedding. The typical Maharashtrian breakfast dish of pohe (flattened rice) is a hot favourite of Malwi people and some estimate that an approximate three truckloads of pohe is consumed in Indore alone, every single day!

Pohe

Rajasthan finds its way into the food of Malwa in the generous use of spices, particularly red chilli powder. A species of red chilli called Nimari mirch is grown here and is famous for its colour and aroma.

The influence of Rajasthan is also seen in the love for dal-bati and dal-bafla. There are two distinct differences between the Rajasthani version and the Malwi cousin. Firstly, in Rajasthan, the bati (wheat bread) is baked underground over coals and dung cakes and then soaked in ghee, while in Malwa the bafla is first boiled in water and then baked over the dung cakes. Secondly, the dal made along with bati in Rajasthan is a mix of five lentil varieties, called pachmeli dal, whereas in Malwa, only tuar



dal is used and the taste has a hint of sweetness as well as the distinct sourness of tamarind (imli) and is called khatti-meethi dal. The Rajasthani dal bati will almost always be accompanied by gatte ki sabzi, kadhi and choorma. This is not compulsory in Malwa, where dal bafla is a complete meal in itself. There is also a difference in shape, bati being almost spherical, while the bafla is disc like, almost like a doughnut or bagel.

Many of the traditional foods of the region are also closely associated with the vrats (fasts) and teej tyohar (festivals and religious ceremonies) that are followed as per the Hindu calendar. The large number of fasts that people keep very faithfully has led to a highly developed repertoire of vrat cuisine. Sabudane ki khichdi (dish made of tapioca sago), aloo ka kees (savory grated potato), chonki mirch, rajgir ka halwa, etc. are dishes created with love and reverence so that one can feast in their fast.

Thali for Vrat (Fasting)

Some unusual customs associated with food are also followed in Malwa. Halchat is an occasion in September-October in which, only those vegetables or grains are

cooked that have been untouched by a hal (plough). Separately, in Chaturmas, a period of four months when the Gods are believed to retire from the earthly world into slumber, certain rituals are followed by the royal households of Malwa, like the Zamindars' which forbid the intake of baingan (Brinjal) and methi (Fenugreek). This ban is lifted on the festival of Dusshera, when baingan ke pakode (brinjal fritters) are made along with kadhi (spiced curry made of yoghurt and gram flour) and offered as prasad to the Goddess, and the vegetables can be consumed henceforth. Dishes made for the Royals were often tempered using a gold guinea, as it is believed that gold and silver have restorative powers.

Being mostly vegetarian, the people of Malwa have developed innovative recipes that are uniquely Malwi, out of staples that are found all over our country. The food is rustic, flavourful and very wholesome. Everything is fresh, grows locally and the quality of produce is superlative. Traditional recipes have been created to suit the seasonal harvest. The cuisine, in essence is a true reflection of the benevolence of nature on this land.

Inputs from Shreekant and Madhavi Zamindar

Maratha Cuisine goes Green at Deo Bagh, Gwalior

Uma Jadhav

Earth Day Network (EDN) is an International Environmental NGO that has grown out of the first Earth Day based in USA, forty five years ago. One can only imagine the need in the 1970's for such an organisation seeing our own country's pathetic pollution and neglect of resources. In India, this NGO now engages over 50,000 organizations in over 192 countries around the world to broaden, diversify and energize the environmental movement. In 2010, EDN opened an office in India. A meeting by chance with EDN India Director- Mrs Karuna Singh at an organic bazar at Kolkata led us to have Madhya Pradesh's first organic mela at Gwalior. She had mentioned that they wanted to start their work in Madhya Pradesh and I offered our premises free as the cause of cleaning and greening the environment is very dear to me. Her commitment to the NGO is hundred percent and her team tirelessly works in different parts of the country with students, women and the community. 'Go organic' is a major program EDN runs in India to build awareness of the benefits of organic and natural food and lifestyle products by providing platforms to bring together manufacturers and sellers of these products with the consumers.

I have been brought up to love nature, despite a very modern educational background. Listening to the sounds of a flowing stream, chirping of birds, crossing rivers, climbing mountains, sitting in silence out in the open under a canopy of stars, meeting local families and learning about conservation of the environment at the

grass roots level, respect for nature – even landslides; making puddings with the help of flowing Himalayan streams without a refrigerator are memories which can never fade! Now I zealously guard 30 species of birds that nest in our campus, which is within city limits and despite the frantic pace of this century, I have strived to get my children to experience these wonders of nature- flora and fauna whenever possible. Now that I am based in Gwalior, I thought it would be an excellent idea to try wean more people away from plastics, chemicals and unhealthy living in our chaotic yet historic city- Gwalior!

EDN was happy to have our 17th century home set in 25 acres as their venue to start their Madhya Pradesh activities and this is how the 26th September Organic Mela and Charity Banquet came about. It was a gentle way through the press and stalls by organizations dealing with food and life style products to remind people that there is an alternate choice!

Guests came in from Delhi for a day with our excellent connection of 3 hours and 15 minutes to the capital via Shatabdi train. Starting with a tour of the complex, that has been my husband, Sardar Dhananjayrao Jadhav's home, comprising of beautiful gardens and stunning architecture. We took the guests from the Mughal era with the 'Char Bagh' and 'Baradari' to the Maratha period 'chhatris' of our ancestors and our family temples and then on to buildings like the zenana which were used for

important state meetings during the freedom struggle to a Spanish style hacienda, which was the former 'mardana' now our home. The zenana, which was converted into a community school by my late mother in law Lady Jadhav, has now been converted by me into a hotel run by the Neemrana group. Visitors are always amazed at how five generations of the Jadhav family, one of the big five Sardar families of the erstwhile Gwalior state have used these premises. Sardar Deorao Bhausahab Jadhav and his son Sardar Krishnarao Deorao Jadhav, father of Maharani Sakhya Raja Scindia used this as a garden home for picnics with overnight halts occasionally in the zenana and mardana areas while they continued to reside at Laxmi Vilas Rajwada. Their elephants and stables were housed here too but with India's independence and merger of states my father in law Sardar Deorao Krishnarao Jadhav moved residence to the mardana.

The piece de resistance was the Royal Organic Buffet served with traditional royal dishes made from organic and natural ingredients provided entirely by Down to Earth and prepared by the cooks of the household. This lunch was attended by a large number of diplomats and their families and various Indian industrialists and their spouses who came from Delhi. It was a major success, as most of the guests had never tasted these special dishes.

The banquet at our home could not be termed so without serving Barbat - a mutton dish favored by the Maratha armies on the march. It is a typical regional dish where meat is cooked in spicy gravy and we prepare this on special festive occasions like Dussehra. Another dish that served was Vade Komde - a chicken curry accompanied by traditional savoury doughnuts, which everyone agreed, were mouth wateringly delicious. For the vegetarians there was Kadai Bhindi - batter fried Okra delicately flavored with dry spices, Aloo ka Achar - a tasty potato



Menu for the Royal Banquet

Barbat

(Mutton dish favoured by the Maratha armies on the march)

Vade Komde

(Chicken curry accompanied by traditional savoury doughnuts)

Mandodari Dal

(Lentils cooked with over 20 ingredients, named after Ravana's wife)

Varan

(Plain lentils with a dollop of pure ghee)

Kadai Bhindi

(Batter fried okra delicately flavoured with dry spices)

Aloo ka Achar

(Tasty potato dish garnished with dry coconut flakes)

Bharleli Vangi

(Stuffed aubergine)

Gole ka Bhaat

(Special rice pulao with cottage cheese)

Khamang Kakdi

(Cucumber salad sprinkled with peanuts, fresh coriander, and lemon juice)

Various Farsans and Chutneys

(Delicious side dishes to complement the meal)

Chapati

(Traditional triangular bread made with flour and oil)

Phirni

(Milk and rice pudding served in individual clay bowls)

Jalebi

(Dessert made with saffron, flour, and sugar)

Ingredients courtesy [Down to Earth](#)
(Slight alteration to the menu
may take place as all ingredients used are organic/natural)

dish garnished with dry coconut flakes and Bharleli Vangi or stuffed aubergine.

Our special rice pulao with cottage cheese balls called Gole ka Bhaat was also made. The Chapati is actually traditional triangular bread made with flour and oil. Various Farsans and Chutneys were presented as side dishes to complement the meal. The Mandodari Dal, named after Ravana's wife, is made of lentils cooked with over 20 ingredients. For the not so adventurous guests Varan, which is plain lentils with a dollop of pure ghee, was served.

Everyone loved the Khamang Kakdi -cucumber salad sprinkled with peanuts, fresh coriander and lime juice. Finally the puddings- the all time favourite jalebis, made with saffron, flour and sugar fried in ghee and our chef's specialty phirni- milk and rice pudding served in clay bowls were much loved especially with the foreigners and children. The special dimensions to this meal were the organic ingredients supplied to our doorstep by Down to Earth.

Guests took a round of the Mela purchasing, making notes and later drove off to see the Gwalior Fort, described as 'the pearl among the fortresses of Hind'. By evening it was time to say good-bye to our day visitors.

ITRHD

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Another dish we served was Vade Komde a chicken curry accompanied by traditional savoury doughnuts which everyone agreed was mouth wateringly delicious.

For the vegetarians there was Kadai Bhindi, batter fried Okra delicately flavored with dry spices, Aloo ka Achar, a tasty potato dish garnished with dry coconut flakes, and Bharleli Vangi or stuffed aubergine.

We made our special rice pulao with cottage cheese balls called Gole ka Bhaat. Our Chapati is actually traditional triangular bread made with flour and oil. Various Farsans and Chutneys were presented as side dishes to complement the meal.

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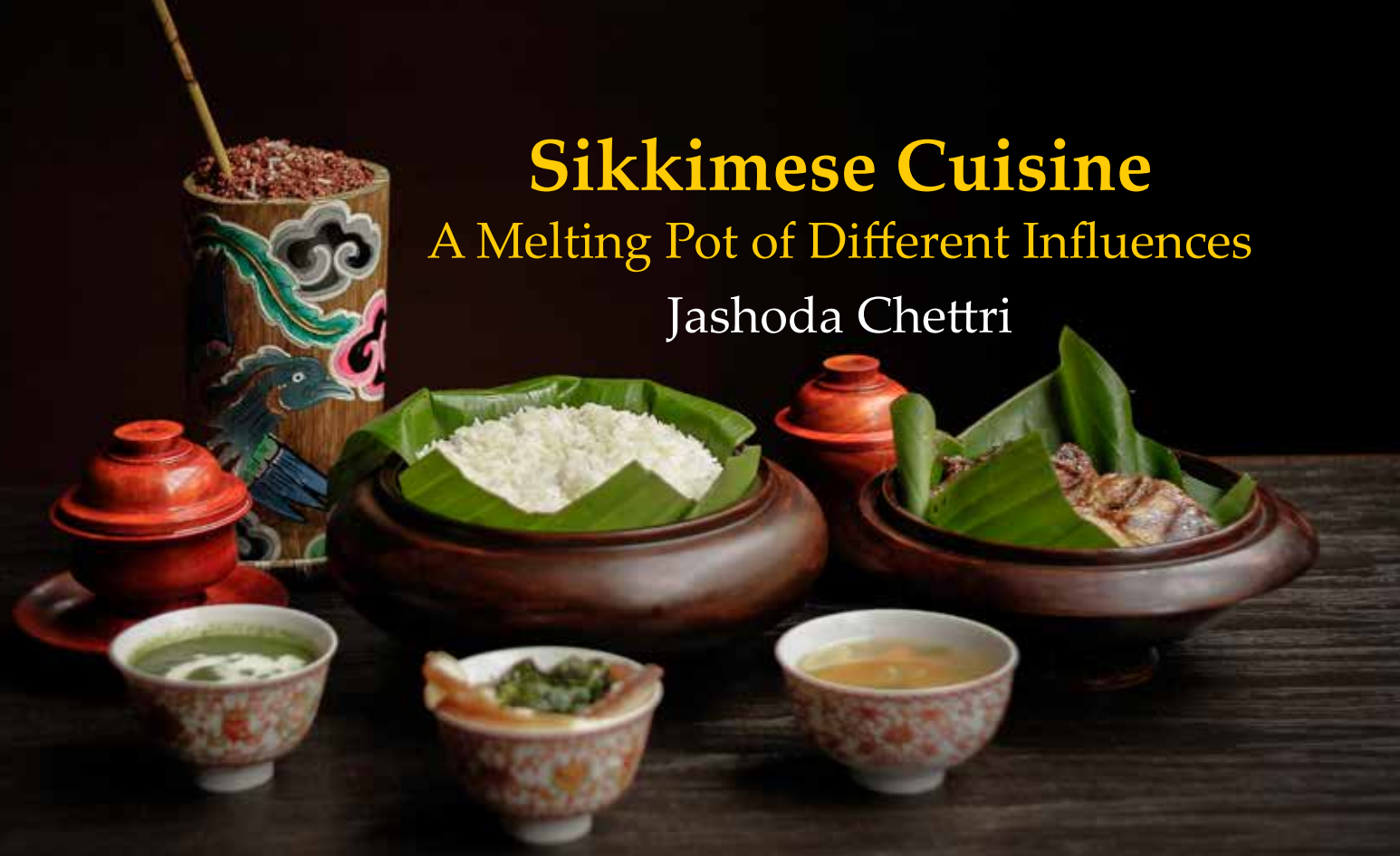
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Sikkimese Cuisine

A Melting Pot of Different Influences

Jashoda Chettri



There is something about Sikkim that makes it different from other hill stations. The same can be said about Sikkimese cuisine. Sikkimese cuisine is different yet heavily influenced by cuisines of other regions. Interestingly, Sikkimese food is a perfect example of amalgamation of different communities. The three ethnic communities of Sikkim- Bhutias, Lepchas and Nepalis have shaped the Sikkimese cuisine. Sikkimese cuisine has also been influenced by Indian and Tibetan style of cooking. One may find a slight variation in the preparation but its essence remains the same. For instance, Sikkimese chicken curry would be less oily and little runnier than the typical chicken curry found in North India.

Being a self confessed foodie, I consider myself fortunate to have been born in a place where every meal is sheer

indulgence. Sikkim is legendary for its peace and hospitality. For me true hospitality lies in practicing the principle of 'Atithi Devo Bhava' (guest is God) in the way we treat and feed our guests- lavishly and generously. We, Sikkimese are known to indulge our guests in the best of food and the popular local drink chhang (alcoholic millet beverage). No social occasion is complete without a lavish spread of local cuisine. Sikkimese cuisine is a unique blend of vegetarian and non- vegetarian food items, which are not only healthy but light on the body too. Momos (dumplings) are a good example of healthy food, as it contains no oil or artificial colour. After idlis, momos could be touted as the healthiest food item on earth. A very special feature of Sikkimese cuisine is that most of the food items are procured from nature in lines of farm to plate concept. For instance, edible fern with chhurpi (local

variation of cottage cheese) is a must try for anyone and it is an eternal favourite with the local populace along with sisnu ko jhol(stinging nettle soup). Most food items do not require extensive processing but that does not mean we eat raw meat or vegetables. The cooking method is usually easy and simple. Fermented beans, bamboo shoot, gundruk and sinki (made from dried leafy vegetables) also give a distinct identity to Sikkimese food. Sel roti (a sweet doughnut like snack) made from rice flour with Nepali style aalu dum is a must try along with zeroh and khaabjay (deep fried snack made from refined flour and salt/ sugar).

Non-vegetarian preparations are equally sumptuous. Beef, pork, chicken and mutton are used liberally in Sikkimese cooking. Karchi marchi (entrails of local goat) is to die for while pork pickle is what makes you salivate at the mere thought of it. Beef curry is ideally accompanied by piping hot steamed rice. The consumption of meat can be attributed to the fact that colder regions are more suited for its consumption. Rice is not only limited to regular rice but a highly nutritious rice preparation is the makai ko chaykhla (maize grits rice).

The pyaaz tamatar ko chutney (onions and tomatoes cooked with slit green chilies) is to Sikkim what aam kaa achar is to the rest of India. This tangy chutney goes well

with both rice and rotis. Sikkimese people are primarily rice eaters but that does not mean we are averse to flour. Rotis are consumed too, though it might not feature very regularly in our meals. Phaapar ko roti (buckwheat flour pancake) is not only packed with nutrients but is also easy to make. Another must try item in Sikkim is the dalley chilly (the round red and green chilies often called fireballs for the right reasons). Dalley paste and pickle are a hot favourite with both locals and visitors. Unsuspecting guests have been tricked to bite into one of those red ones only to realise that they are not cherries. Dalley can be super addictive!

Sikkimese people are nature lovers and we live in perfect harmony with the nature and our environment. This is reflected in our eating habits too. People in rural areas are adept at identifying edible natural food items like mushrooms, ferns, berries and tuber, roots and shoots. Sweet potatoes, yam, tapioca (known as tarul locally) are some of the favourites, which are best enjoyed with silaam ko chutney and Temi Tea, the organic tea produced in Temi in South Sikkim. Sikkim has become the first Organic State of India with 75,000 hectares of agricultural land converted to certified organic land. So come and enjoy eating the Sikkimese way- the healthy way.



Food for the Soul

Arun Budhiraja

K. Bhaskaran Nair is a man of habit. Every morning, just after 5am, the 65-year old retired Mathematics professor steps out of his house and walks the short distance to the celebrated Guruvayoor temple. As is the prescribed norm for devotees to shrines in Kerala, he wears a stark-white mundu knotted at the waist with another unstitched white garment thrown over his bare shoulders. To some it may seem to be a regular constitutional, but for Bhaskaran the early morning visit to the temple is a journey into himself one, which he's been doing each day since his retirement. In many ways, it is merely a continuation of a habit inculcated during his childhood, when, more than five decades earlier a young Bhaskaran would accompany his grandfather to the temple. After the early darshan, Bhaskaran would delight in the prasadam he would get. His favourite was the Trimadhuram, a syrupy and highly energizing mash of bananas, coconut, jaggery and honey.

His grandfather has been gone a long time, the temple town of Guruvayoor bears little resemblance to the tiny hamlet it was, but Bhaskaran's love for Trimadhuram is intact and it goes beyond the taste. Today, Bhaskaran understands the nuances of the shrine's offerings. Guruvayoor, like all major Hindu temples, has a strict method in its rituals and practices that follow an age-old code. Offerings and temple food change in accordance to season and vary in type in keeping with the time of the day. If the Trimadhuram is made early morning, there is a sound reason for it. The Trimadhuram, and its companion offering Malar, though light in eating, are high in energy and hence, form the perfect start to the day. Easy to digest, crunchy, yet soft, sweetened with jaggery and honey – the

healthiest sweeteners. There can be no better way to rev up the human body for the day's work. Had the same offerings been consumed in the evening, digestion would have been a challenge.

Cut to another time of the day and we find the pattern repeated. Between 11:30am and noon, Guruvayoor once again sees the most appropriate temple food being offered to God and later served as prasad to devotees. A variety of paysams are offered, mostly rice-based and rich in nutritious coconuts, bananas, jaggery, ghee, cardamom powder, refined flour – the ingredients, their quantity and cooking processes changing from paysam to paysam. While this sumptuous offering must surely delight the Gods, a clear practical objective is clearly observed: that of ensuring devotees a filling prasad at a time that is close to lunch.

This remarkable meeting of the spiritual with the practical is witnessed in temples across India. In the region of Braj, which is as distinct from Kerala as can be imagined; temple food follows similar – though not identical – patterns of keeping up with seasons and time patterns during a day. While the high energy giving makhan-mishri is an all-season offering in the Mangala prahar prior to 7am, winter has its own charms, such as the Daulat ki Chaat. In the latter offering, full cream milk is heated in a heavy bottomed pan and once thickened slightly, mishri, elaichi, cream and kesar stirred in. Most interestingly, this mix is left uncovered under the stars on a cold winter night. Before dawn, cream of tarter is added and whisked rapidly to form mounds of froth. This heavenly mix, also known as Nimish, is popular in Varanasi too.

The next time band is the Shringar prahar, lasting from 7:30 to 9:30am. Staple fare in temples across North and Central India is the ever-popular peda, which appears in a variety of flavours. The main ingredient is khoya, which is based in condensed milk. An alternative appears in Vrindavan's Radha Raman temple, where the kuliya is a popular prasad. The kuliya is a small earthen pot in, which the prasad is given. Milk, mishri, elaichi, pods of green elaichi crushed, kesar and pista come together to form a soft grainy-textured sweet, which is eaten with one's fingers. A delightful and energy filled way to kick off the day.

In the Gwala prahar, also called Madhyahn, which lasts from 9:30 to about 11am, buttermilk keeps the body cool in summer. The Braj region throws up an interesting regional variant in winter, called Dhuan Chaach. The earthy, smoky flavour keeps buttermilk aficionados in good cheer even during winter mornings. Then there is the Lapsi. At Shrinathji, in Nathdwara, it is based in thooli – cracked wheat or dalia. Added to it are milk, water, mishri, elaichi, badam, pista and ghee – a heavenly and filling magic potion to satiate a devotee in the morning. While it is offered all year round in Nathdwara, down South it is a summer offering. In Udipi, it is the Rava Lapsi that holds center-stage.

The one prahar of the day when God is offered a truly sumptuous spread is the one in the forenoon. The Raj Bhog is the main meal of the day post, which the deity takes an afternoon siesta. Balanced and complete in every way, it includes two kinds of vegetables – prepared in a way that one is dry and the other has gravy. In the Govind Devji temple in Imphal, Manipur, kheer is served with a small portion of black rice. The contrasting colours are a visual delight while the complementing textures soothe the palate. In yet another instance of marrying the spiritual with the practical, devotees are served black rice only in small quantity as this high protein and carbohydrate food

is difficult to digest. The best things truly come in small quantities!

The 11:30-12 noon prahar also finds Guruvayoor at its delicious best. The Navakam Paysam, Pal Paysam, Palada, Erriti Payasam and Paradi Paysam add an amazing dimension to the day. In contrast, the rather plain looking ghee arno made in Puri's Jagannath Temple surprises a visitor with a burst of orange flavor. Also surprising is the same shrine's namak khichdi. In fact, rice-based offerings form the staple for this prahar across temples. Just as there are various forms of khichdi, there are also many types of bhaats, ranging from the Meva Bhaat and Dahi Bhaat made in Braj to Shrinathji's Aamras Bhaat and Shrikhand Bhaat. Given that this is the biggest meal of the day, food like dal, kadhi, kashiphal ki subzi all find a place, as do different forms of raita and sweets like murabba and fruit rasa.

Given the importance of food in temple life, it comes as no surprise that most shrines have anecdotes built around Raj bhog food. Take the case of Imphal's black rice. Deep purple rather than black, this was also called 'forbidden rice' as it was consumed only by Chinese emperors and not commoners.

Another example is Vrindavan's arbi, prepared in devotion of Krishna's favourite gopi, Radha, on the occasion of Radha Ashtami, the recipe of this dish is kept a secret by the Goswamis. In Mayapur's Jagannath temple, the Lord is said to love katahal (jackfruit) ki subzi. Local oral traditions state that once a nearby farmer complained that someone from the shrine was stealing his jackfruits at night. He laid a trap in his field using wire meshes. The next time he saw his jackfruit missing, he found a bit of blue cloth on his trap and rushed to the temple. The priests were puzzled at how Balram's blue dhoti had developed a tear. Truly mysterious!

At around 4pm, deities are believed to awake from their siesta, fresh for the devotees of the evening. First comes the Utthapan prahar, which lasts till 5:30pm. This is followed by the Sandhya bhog, which ends at 6:30pm. While coconuts are offered during the Utthapan prahar, sandhya is time for the Lord to savour a refreshing drink, especially if it is summer. While the saunf sharbat is staple fare, aamras and aaam ka panna are also widely offered. Braj has its own specialty in the form of munakka sharbat, made of raisins dried in a special way. Equally distinct is the phoolon ki thandai made in Varanasi's Kashi Vishwanath temple. The kharbooze ka panna, tarbooz ka panna and sattua are equally refreshing too. After sunset, the nature of the offerings transforms yet again. Between 6 and 7:45pm, it's time for sandhya aarti and for a snack. Namkeen chana dal in Varanasi, adrak ki bati in Braj, crispi kharkhari in Nathdwara and chakuli in Udupi delight devotees, possibly as much as they do for the Lord himself.

The last prahar of the day is the Shayan bhog, which ends at 8:45pm. Offerings are light and are meant to aid smooth digestion. High on spices like pepper, this acts as the day's last meal for devotees. Shrinathji has a rich offering at this time with food ranging from mirchi ka saag, thapari, leelva ki poori, khasa poori and more. Poori and aloo, in different variants are popular across most of India. Kachori vale aloo at the Kashi Vishwanath are matched by Braj's sookhe aloo ki subzi. A day that began with delicious offerings ends on an equally taste bud-friendly note.

To those who believe that the proof of the pudding is in the eating, when it comes to temple food, it is actually in the cooking. After all, food prepared in a temple is first offered to the deity to satisfy a hunger that is spiritual. Thus, food becomes sanctified prasad. Cooked in enormous quantity, it is available for distribution to hordes at devotees at

popular shrines, all of which have long traditions for each food item they prepare. Temple food is usually prepared by male members of the family, who care for the deity. Preparation guidelines are strict. Bathing is mandatory before entering the kitchen. Brahmin cooks normally wear a piece of freshly washed white cloth tied around the body to facilitate easy movement. Talking while cooking is discouraged. Often, a thin mask is worn around the nose and mouth to ensure hygiene and purity.

In the high-speed life of the modern era, it may appear that traditional practices associated with temples are gradually fading out. But to experience the essence of such practices one must travel to rural India and to smaller towns, where they live on. Not just in temples but in the hearts and minds of priests and devotees. This is the soul of India, as it has been for hundreds of years.

To conclude, a small anecdote, which captures the devotion of selfless service to the Lord: Padmanath Das was a sincere, though poor, devotee of Krishna. Each day, he would pile white chanas on a plate and offer them to the Lord. Once, when he had a few guests, they laughed at what he was offering as prasad. Picking up each chana, Das explained that one was halwa, another a jalebi and a third a rasgulla and so on. To Das, each chana was the symbol of a different sweet that he offered the Lord. When the guests ate the chanas, the taste they savoured was not of a chana but of the sweets Das had mentioned. This is a testimony to the emotion that Das felt when he offered the chanas, in his heart each being representative of a sweet he could not afford. The Lord's divine acceptance was signaled in the transformation of the chanas into sweets.

Truly, food for the soul!

The Gastronomical Trail of the Tribal North East India

Ashish Chopra

'Tribal' – the word itself generates an immense amount of misnomers. Time and again the word has been associated with primitive ideas, practices and culture. However, I do hope this article is able to break some of the stereotypes.

It is not easy to be born in India and to be writing about food, let alone tribal food. My father was an anthropologist. Hence, I accredit my interest in tribes and culture to those genes. My trail of tribal food started almost three decades ago when as a child I would accompany my late father on many of his field trips to remote corners of Himachal, Kashmir and subsequently to the north eastern states. The food fabric of these regions became an integral part of my gastronomical quests.

Although a large part of the tribal populace has integrated with the mainstream over time and has undergone a sea change in lifestyle, what has remained closest to its purist form is their cuisine. As I was exploring all of these, I could also see a gradual unfolding of patterns, common threads and designs amongst tribal cuisine of all regions in India. In an age of growing animosity and apathy amongst human, tribal hospitality is a shining example for all. Their festivals, dance and song are pulsating with power, joy and enthusiasm for life.

Although tribes of the world are differentiated on the basis of six primary ethnic groups: Negritos, Pro-Australoids or Austrics, Mongoloids, Dravidian, Nordics and Western Brachycephals, for the sake of convenience we will segregate them on basis of the region they inhabit. I'm

certain you will be far happier singing North, South, East and West than spewing a mouth-full of syllables! And for this particular issue, we will stick to what we call India's Northeast.

North East India

Northeast India, the only region that currently forms a land bridge between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, for me is home. I am forever enthralled by the brilliance of colourful hand woven textiles, the captivating folk heritage, its non-severed umbilical cord with nature and most importantly the wonderful variety of food that the region comprising eight beautiful states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, has to offer. And it is a promise that it will be no less than a spiritual journey to walk through the lanes of these hills and discover what these people are made of. However, for this occasion, let it just be food.

While Indian cuisine has taken the world by storm with the ubiquitous curry, tribal cuisine avoids those very items that define Indian food: oil and spices. Peculiar, bland, hot, aromatic, healthy, fleshy, fatty – yes these adjectives can be used all at the same time for a northeastern tribal meal. While a meal is incomplete without a steaming platter of steamed rice, various green vegetables and predominance of meat and fresh water fish is obvious. The most defining part of northeastern tribal cuisine is the usage of minimalist spice. A chilli or two (enough for sparking the fire), ginger

and garlic, occasionally sesame and some local herbs are the ingredients to tickle your taste buds.

Love for the Pungent and the Heat: Though each state has their peculiar culinary style, each of them definitely has a nose for the pungent aka bamboo shoot, fermented soya beans, fermented fish, and fermented meat amongst others. Bamboo shoot is used widely as a souring agent in almost all the tribes. Dried fish chutney is relished in almost every state. People in Tripura love their fermented fish preparation called shidal while ngari is a must have in Manipur (though Manipur is largely non-tribal; it has a good segment of tribal populace). Fermented soya bean popularly known as akhuni in Nagaland, kinema in Sikkim and turumbai in Meghalaya, is a significant ingredient, used to create a pungent aroma in various dishes, also used as a pickle. When I say pickle, an array of hot chillies is indispensable for me to mention. The world's hottest chilli popularly known as Raja Mircha or the king chilli has various names like U-morok in Manipur and bhoot jolokia in Assam and is widely relished. None of the pork dishes for example, in a state like Nagaland, is complete without the flavour of this fiery chilli. I'd say, if you have a brave heart and a desire for fire, just ask for it. The variety of chillies found in this region is mind blowing – the bird eye chilli known as khud jolokia in Assam, the dalle of Sikkim are only the tip of the 'hot'berg.

Rice: Rice is fundamental to the cuisine. You have various kinds at that; the favourite of them all is the wild sticky rice. Many a times rice is prepared in hollow bamboo tubes. Apart from steaming the rice, they prepare them like a stew. The Bodos of Assam prepare a stew out of chicken and a rice powder called onla wangkhrai. The tribes in Meghalaya have a rice preparation called jadoh made out of rice and pig liver. In Arunachal Pradesh too, like all other states, rice is consumed at every meal and has different names; ekayi, tongtep, khautek, porok amin, dung poo are a few. Dals and lentils are also staple,

however, the methods of preparation varies. Most of the times in the north eastern states, rice will be prepared with yam stem, bamboo shoot and other locally grown herbs.

Love for the Meats and Fish: These tribes smoke their meat at home over their large kitchen fire, ferment them underground, literally. Well, the same goes with beef, chicken, fish, snails, shrimps, silk worms, red ants and others. And of course it is not just peculiar to the Nagas but various other tribes of northeast India. For the tribes in Arunachal, killing mithun or the bison is the symbol of utmost valour and wealth. And of course eating it!

Like pork, chicken, duck and all other edible flesh, fish is also very popular and has variety of ways of preparation. Fresh water fish is barbecued in banana leaves in Meghalaya, Assam and other states. Fish intestines are relished. Many people make mixture of rice powder or a handful of steamed rice and fish intestines and prepare a delicious preparation out of it.

Technically Manipur is not a tribe-dominated state, as their prime inhabitants, the Maiteis, are staunch Vaishnavaits. However, Manipur also has its fair population of tribes namely the Kukis, Paiteis, Zillions etc. Singzu is a salad prepared from green vegetables, chick peas and ngari and is relished all over the state.

Not without Veggies: Despite the predominance of protein in their cuisine, the people of northeast are heavy vegetable consumers as well, given the fact that they are grown naturally in abundance. Nagaland and Mizoram are organic by legislation! In Sikkim they ferment leafy vegetables like rayo saag, leaves of mustard, radish and cauliflower and sundry it for later consumption. They call these preparations gundruk and sinki. Sinki is prepared from radish taproot only. And of course, Sikkim is known all over for its cottage cheese. The Riyangs of Tripura love to cook their vegetables in hollow bamboo over charcoal fire. Just imagine the flavour it would exude!

Beverages in North East: What do these intoxicatingly beautiful people do when it comes to intoxication? Why, they brew their own beer of course! All the tribes have their recipes of brewing rice beer. As it is self explanatory, it is brewed from rice. Rice is soaked in water for several days to let it ferment. Few intoxication agents are added to give that zing. These agents are mostly local herbs. In Arunachal, the local rice beer is called opo or apong or yu, o or marwah. While in Assam it is called laopani or xaaz. Each tribe has their own method of distillation; however the raw materials are more or less the same. Most of the times, the rice beer is offered to the deities before consumption, and needless to say, every celebration is pretty incomplete without serving rice beer.

But of course, we must not forget that Assam is the tea hub of the world. Though the people involved in the laborious cultivation are the adivasis who were brought by the British planters some two hundred years ago from the Chota Nagpur plateau primarily the region of Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Hence a huge number of Oraon, Mundas, Khariyas, Saoras have become completely engrained in the demography of Assam and follow not only some of their original food habits, but also certain assimilated habits. Black tea which the people in Assam call laal saah (literally translated as red tea), is mostly consumed with jaggery and is extremely popular in the villages. Towards the Northern part of Arunachal Pradesh lies the great Himalayan range and its chill and the mountainous topography definitely makes butter tea extremely popular, especially in the districts of Tawang, Siang and Kameng.

As I say, it is never enough when it comes to food-be it eating, cooking or writing. I still feel a little incapacitated because of the fact that there are several things, several dishes I had to give a miss because of the extensive subject

matter. Considering the fact that the northeast India's demography is tribe dominated, time and space is always insufficient to talk of the legends.

However I would like to share some gastronomical facts of some of my favourite North eastern states.

NAGALAND

Nagaland has about sixteen tribes and each has distinctive styles of cooking to offer. Nagas, relish pork and beef, and many Nagas rear animals to be slaughtered at feasts. Mutton is not consumed at the same scale and also not reared at home. They also keep a stock of smoked and salted meat all the round year.

A very significant feature of Naga food is that, it is very (very) hot. Raja chillies (and in a generous quantity), is an important (and sometimes the main) ingredient of almost all the dishes that they prepare. The spices are kept to the least and sometimes might have only salt and chillies. The simplicity and use of freshly available herbs, makes the Naga cuisine very distinct.

Meat is cut into large chunks and the other spices used include ginger, garlic and mejinga seeds and onions (local ones which are again very hot).

Festivals all the year round are associated with crop growing. Some festivals are peculiar to a certain tribe, like the Angamis (residents of Kohima), celebrate a festival which symbolizes protection of life. This festival involves men doing all the chores, right from cooking to washing and cleaning. They also live in isolation from women. They believe this would strengthen the men folk.

December sees celebration of the harvest festival (Terhunysi), where Nagas eat beef and pork and have access to unlimited zou (home brewed rice beer).

Tuluni, another harvest festival is celebrated by Semas. Semas are the inhabitants of Zunheboto and Wokha districts of Nagaland.

Akhuni (fermented Soya beans), is an important ingredient for their dishes. For the Lothas, bamboo shoot is an essential ingredient of their dishes.

SIKKIM

Sikkim, the Himalayan Mountain state of India, is the most recent member among the North Eastern states. Topography of this place is characterized by the presence of the most magnificent mountain chain in the world which includes the Khangchenjunga, the world's third highest mountain which is worshipped by the local inhabitants as the protector deity to their land.

Sikkim has a cuisine which is influenced by the diverse inhabitants of the place. The Lepchas, Bhutia and Nepalese who reside here have given a very unique flavour to the food of this place.

Rice is the staple food like in the other states of this region. Meat and dairy products are consumed when available. Various fermented food and beverages are part of their dietary intake.

Gundruk and Sinki are traditional fermented vegetable products prepared during winter when fresh perishable vegetable is in abundance. Gundruk is a fermented product of leafy vegetable such as rayo sag, leaves of mustard, radish and cauliflower. Sinki is prepared from radish tap root only. Gundruk and Sinki are sun dried after fermentation and stored for consumption. This can be preserved for almost a year, and cooked when ever one wants it. Kinema is another fermented preparation (soya bean), has a chewy property with unique flavour, usually consumed as a main side-dish curry along with cooked rice in meals.

Another interesting preparation is Chhurpi, a traditional cottage cheese which gives a texture of a white soft mass with mild sour taste. Momo is popular here too and prepared in the same way as the other states. Bamboo shoot is popular too, both the fermented and unfermented form of bamboo shoot is consumed. A Nepalese contribution to Sikkim cuisine is Saelroti which is prepared from well-mixed fermented rice batter, deep fried, ring-shaped, elastic, commonly consumed as confectionery bread in festival and special occasions.

Here unlike the other seven states people do eat roti (bread) and prepare various types of pickles (achar).

MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya literally means abode of clouds and being true to this it also has the wettest place on earth. The climate is pleasant all year round and is an ideal place to spend a holiday. Shillong, the capital of this state is known as "Scotland of the East". The British colonials saw this place to have great resemblance with Scotland. And it was their place to spend a vacation in India. But the local food is nothing close to the food served in Scotland.

Three main tribes are Khasi, Garos and Jaintias, and the foods they prepare are similar to rest of the North East region. Their favourite meat is pork; mutton and beef are not very popular. They have some mouth watering fish based dishes. Fish cooked in bamboo hollow, fish baked in banana leaves are a favourite among the people too. Spices and fat are again used sparsely, ginger, garlic, onions and green chillies is all that is needed to cook up the dishes from here.

Among the three tribes there is slight variation in the style of cooking. Garos use lots of indigenous soda in their cooking. Khasis have a liking to fermented fish dishes and also pork dishes.

Apart from the other Meghalaya specialty, what is indispensable is the importance of khwai (betel nut). A day for a resident of Meghalaya starts with a mouthful of khwai, betel leaf and chemical lime. It is also a vital requirement for all important occasions; in wedding ceremonies the groom presents khwai, betel leaf, chemical lime, rice beer and new clothes to the eldest female member of the bride's family. It is also offered to guests, it's had before meals to create more appetite and after meal it said to help in digestion. Life here revolves around betel nut.

In earlier days, when food was offered to a departed soul it was believed that it would help the soul in its journey from earth to the next world. After the arrival of Christianity, these practices have ceased to take place. Now Khasis prefer to have a tea party or hold a grand feast after a funeral.

TRIPURA

Native people of Tripura have coexisted with migrants from Bangladesh and now they are more in number, but this has not led to the extinction of their tribal culture. Though now, the tribes have started using pulses and spices.

Like the other states, the residents of this state too are not patrons of too much spice in food. Though they do like a little colour in their food, therefore use turmeric.

Majority of the tribes still live in the interiors of Tripura while the Bengalis reside in the town of Agartala. Tripura does love shidal, a fermented fish preparation. Each home would have a stock of this fish close at hand. Shidal is prepared by cleaning the fish, adding salt, and mustard oil and then it is put away in a clay pot for about a week or till it reaches a certain stage of pungency. For a non native, to relish shidal, would be an acquired taste but for the native, shidal is a flavouring agent and also put in a number on vegetarian dishes. They like pork, mithun (a

type of buffalo) and rear these at home.

Food is simple, a simple meal prepared on an ordinary day, would be steamed rice, fermented fish (prepared by using only soda and ginger). Degree of difficulty wise almost all the dishes are a breeze.

MANIPUR

Manipur claims to have the most number of dishes in comparison to other North Eastern states. Also the cuisine is the most evolved one, involving more than the usual boiling, steaming and roasting for preparing meals. The dishes are spicier; require oil for cooking and also require more elaborate preparation. Over the years, Manipuri cuisine has been able to keep the original flavour of the traditional dishes.

People of Manipur are mainly the Meiteis and people belonging to the hill tribes. Meiteis are devotees of Hindu goddess, Vaishnodevi and therefore red meat is not consumed in their festivals. People belonging to the hill tribes do consume a lot of red meat. Food here thus is also guided by one's religion. Meitei women enter the kitchen only after taking a bath.

People of Manipur take pride in displaying their culinary skills. Rightly, a typical Manipuri thali could consist as many as 25-30 items, served on a banana leaf (for the plate) and bowls made from folding banana leaves in a certain way. Rice is served in centre and the bowls of dishes in a semi circle.

Dishes are mainly various chutneys, lentil, and vegetable preparations like ooti, hawai-thongba, bora, kelli-channa, eromba, pakoda thonba and many more. Thongba is a word which is used after many dishes; it means vegetable.

Chutneys are an important part of their diet, singzu,

chutney of unripe papaya and fermented fish is very popular here. An ordinary meal on a normal day could be of three or four items, and it may or may not have fish.

People of Manipur do like non vegetarian food (especially fish) but it is not served on all occasions. Certain occasions like utsavs, call for food to be prepared by Brahmins. These festivals are also the best time to taste the local food (vegetarian). Many of the festivals are similar to festivals celebrated in northern and western India.

MIZORAM

Spread across rolling hills astride the tropic of Cancer, Mizoram is situated at a limb at the southernmost tip of India's North East. Historically, its landlocked status and relative geographical isolation from its neighbours has meant that there has been little outside influence on its way of life. While the hordes of invaders that poured over the Khyber Pass greatly affected the culture of North India, Mizoram's seclusion has left the native customs relatively intact for centuries. The gastronomic culture has therefore evolved more or less indigenously with some contributions from neighbouring Myanmar.

The word "Mizo" is used essentially in the context of the tribes such as the Lushai, Hmar, Paite, Lakhers and Reangs. Though a distinct common thread runs through the culinary habits of these various peoples, certain unique dietary preferences remain.

An important determinant of Mizo cuisine had been the hunter gatherer tradition of local tribes. The verdant forests that surround most villages offer up a bounty of leaves, roots, nuts and mushrooms that provide cheap dietary additions to food grown on the jhums. Women on their way to and from the fields keep topping up their em (baskets carried on the back with a strap over the head) with an assortment of this forest produce and firewood.

In addition, many people maintain small green patches outside their huts. A variety of plants, the tender shoots of which regularly harvested are grown in these little kitchen gardens. All these provide an abundance of ingredients that are readily boiled together in various combinations and eaten with rice to produce simple meals.

The vast local knowledge of edible forest produce, availability of home grown vegetables and extremely simple cooking means that something is always in reach for the cooking pot and no one, however poor, goes hungry.

Mizo cooking is characterized principally by the general absence of spices. This can perhaps be explained by the geographical isolation of the state and the comparatively recent advent of British rule followed by Independence. Unlike many other parts of India therefore, traditional spices have not found their way into the gastronomic culture. Items like cardamom, cloves, pepper and cinnamon are therefore almost nonexistent in Mizo cuisine. Variety in taste is obtained by the addition of chillies, ginger, salt and tumeric besides flavouring of certain leaves and roots. Sa um (fermented pork fat) is a frequent addition to many vegetable dishes providing taste (odour to the uninitiated palate), besides the illusion of meat. This heady brew is prepared by boiling down pork fat to near liquidity. The concoction is allowed to ferment forming a liquid that is used sparingly for months to come. Bekang (fermented soya) is another addition lending flavour to many dishes. Drying and smoking of meat and leaves is a major Mizo (if not North Eastern) habit. This practice ensures that certain food items like dried meat, bamboo shoots and yam leaves (bal) are available regardless of the season. The traditional Mizo hearth is often therefore anointed with an assortment of edible items like corn, yam leaves and chunks of meat or game hanging over the fireplace. Smoked pork (vawksa rep) is a Mizo favourite, its delicious aroma enjoyed alone, unspoiled by any other addition. It is also added to a variety of dishes.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Rice is the staple food of all the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Dung Po (Steam Rice) is the most popular version of cooking rice. Two brass utensils are used for this purpose. In this part of the world, the myth persist that food cooked in a brass utensils are always delicious. On the top, the rice is filled with some leaves to secure it from scattering as the pot is hollow from beneath and the 2nd pot is filled with water to generate steams to cook the rice. The cooked rice is wrapped in leaves to serve. Kholam is also another popular and unique process of cooking rice. In this method a bamboo tube is used instead of metal utensils. The rice is filled with water in a custom made bamboo tube measuring 21/2 feet in height than it is left beside the traditional heath with enough heat to cook it. Before eating the rice the outer layer of the bamboo tube is delicately incised.

Wungwut Ngam .. Chicken with rice powder is a delicious method of preparing chicken. The required amount of rice is fried till brown and than it is grinded to powder. The rice powder is poured in the half cooked chicken with all the indigenous ingredients than it is left to boil..The most extraordinary tribal cuisine is a soup called PASA, it is fish soup prepared from fresh raw fish. The head and tail portion is chopped off. The remaining red meat is minced and a paste is prepared. All the ingredients like garlic, ginger, chilly, makat, pee chim khim, phoi hom (indigenous scented spice leaves) are grinded to make a paste. The paste of the fresh raw fish and spices are mixed and flavored with the juice of ooriam (Khumpatt) leaves which gives a tint of greenish color to the soup. It is said that during war time, tribal soldiers used to prepare this soup instead of cooking food that would have revealed their hideouts. The simple tribal recipes are endless; the aforementioned are the most common cooking method across the state. However, if one desires to taste the various

tribal delicacies, then one has to travel across the state because every major tribes of the state has many sub-tribes and each sub-tribe has different food habits and lifestyle.

Belief and religion also plays a pivotal role in dictating the choice of food.

Food in Arunachal is very easy to prepare and reflects the simplicity of the people with the use of minimalistic oil or spices.

ASSAM

Well, to begin with, I needed a bit of help. I asked a very dear friend to identify a few green leaves which were not laai, lofa, paleng, dhoniya, podina, matikanduri, maanimuni, dhekia, durun, khutora, narasingha, xoroyoh, jilmil and kosu (these are Assamese names of the various popular green leafy vegetables.) She wanted to give me 'authentic' information and called up her mother who sat with her grandmother on speaker phone to go really authentic to the days when Assamese people actually used to have a hundred and one green leaves on the eve of Bohag Bihu (festival of spring or new life.) Some of the greens I learnt about were modhusaleng, rohbaghini, bonjaluk, xukoloti, pipoli, titabahok, borkosu, xetbhedali, bhumloti, xewali, keturihalodhi, mermerilota, tongloti, ghilalota, tengamora, long pasoli, brahmi, kolmou, xuka puroi, monua, masandari, ponounua amongst several others. This is Assamese food; rustic, healthy, bland yet hot occasionally. The mouthwatering kosu xaak a.k.a colacacia leaves with lots of black pepper leaves your nasal cavity drained, yet enriches you with a marvelous experience! If I consider the banana plantain to be one of the greens, then its stem known as posola is the next delicacy I have to mention.

Though we cannot categorize the Assamese people as carnivorous, they do have their share of flesh for every

special occasion be it a duck roast, goose curry, pigeon meat, pork with spinach leaves and bamboo shoot or other 'lesser' meats like chicken! Duck and goose are best cooked with kumura or the ash gourd. Also used is posola-the body of the banana plantain, as I mentioned earlier. Talking of Assamese food to the Assamese and not mentioning fish is like committing hara-kiri or suicide. The blessed land that Assam is, the Brahmaputra and its tributaries and various other fresh water resources like the pond (Pukhuri) at your backyard, the paddy fields, the streams and springs are endowed with various kinds of delicious fish. Small, medium, big, all sizes and shapes are available. Small fish like donikona, puthi, bheseli, randhoni, kholihona, misa etc., medium sized fish like goroi, magur, kawoi, muwa, pabho, bato, tura, botiya, neriya and bigger ones like rou, borali, xitol, khoriya, sengeli etc. just tickle your taste buds with their umpteen flavours. Maas, as the natives call it are caught on jaakoi (straining contraption made of bamboo used in ponds and paddy fields), thuha, khuka, sepa, (bamboo traps placed in paddy fields), boroxi (fish hook) or zaal (fishing net). Fish is stored in a bamboo container called khaloi and can be hung around your waist while fishing.

Maasor tenga (sour fish curry) is the most popular Assamese fish preparation. Various souring agents like ou tenga, thekera, tenga mora, local tomatoes, lemon etc. are used during the preparation of the jool (thin curry). Minimal spices characterize Assamese cuisine. Use of chillies like khud (pinch)/mem jolokia (referring to the spicy flavour despite its grain size), bhut jolokia (also known as Raja Mircha-world's hottest chilli.) Pepper or jaluk is common be it in fish preparations or duck and geese. Apart from curries, fish is relished deep fried and roasted on charcoal fire. Small fish like puthi is roasted and mashed with mustard oil, salt, chopped onions and coriander leaves. The rustic cooking and impeccable raw flavour is simply out of the world! In Assam anything that

is mashed is called pitika, the most popular ones being bengena (brinjal) and aloo (potato). All Assamese will swear by it. Potato is popular and it is customary during Magh Bihu (harvest festival) to have sweet potatoes (mitha aloo, muwa aloo, kath aloo etc.) while the morning meji (a huge customary fire during Magh Bihu) is lit. While one mentions Bihu, not mentioning pitha will be criminal. Pithas are traditional rice cakes prepared during the festive season. Both sweet and salty, pithas are dry and either steamed or roasted while others are fried. Jaggery is the most popular sweetener. Til pitha, gheela pitha, xutuli pitha, sunga pitha, tekeli mukhot diya pitha, paat pitha, muthiya pitha, pheni pitha are few that I think of. Til pitha is unique considering the fact that it is dry, has a black sesame and jaggery filling and looks like an oversized cigarette. The best way to consume, following the traditional way is by dipping it in rongsa saah (literally red tea but is actually black tea.) While I am still talking about harvest and Magh Bihu-a Bihu that signifies a good harvest and of course is signified by having huge feasts. You will find all what I have discussed so far, all under one roof on a single day and of course much more.

I have been mentioning duck and geese quite often and that's because hanh (duck) and raaz hanh (geese) are regarded delicacies during special ceremonies. You can say, they are the 'turkeys of Thanksgiving'. While local chicken is more popular for day to day use. Gahori manxo or pork is the 'forbidden' meat and is nevertheless consumed by various communities and has different styles of preparation. There are some who store the pork in a pit while others cook it dry with crunchy spinach leaves.

Some use bamboo shoot or khorisa and make a curry out of it. The Ahoms have an old saying that if you did not have gahori on Bihu, then you will be born as one in your next birth. Probably it came as a mischievous story told to children in the families by the older ones and the legend

spun itself hence forth. Paaro manxo or pigeon meat is also a delicacy. Two preparations are most popular-a dry one with koldil or the banana flower or a jool (curry) with lots of black pepper. As I write this, I am getting hungry by the minute, and I am waiting eagerly for my next golden chance to run to North East as always.

Ahoms and a few other communities have a tradition of consuming eggs of red ants (amlori tup) on Bohag Bihu-the festival of spring. In fact, the eggs from the big nests on mango trees are the best ones and believe me; the boys in villages have to undergo quite an ordeal with the red ant formic acid bites! What's good food without a little adventure? However, I hardly see many youngsters enthusiastic enough to go through the same ordeal of celebration these days. Probably there are not many forests left to provide such scope. Or for that matter, community feasts have almost become a redundant concept. Some people say that the sense of neighbourhood is gradually diminishing in Assamese society.

Paan Tamul

Have I missed anything? Yes, a lot! I am not yet done with the pickles, tamul (actually tamul-pan; a combination of beetle nut and the leaf) and the legendary xaaz or laupani or the local rice beer. Like all other north eastern states, Assam also has its traditional rice beer. Various communities call it by various names and with slight change in the distillation process; it gives a little variation in the zing. Pithaguti (a cake of several herbs) and rice are the prime components all over.

Here is a my one of favourite Naga pork recipes which I would like to share

Thevo Chu (Pork with Bamboo Shoot - Angami style...Angami is a prominent tribe from Nagaland)

Ingredients

750 grams pork

Fermented bamboo shoot (1 medium tablespoon)

Roasted red chilli powder (3 tea spoons) or the best option is Naga Raja chilli

Pepper (10-15 flowers); can use grinded pepper as an alternative

Ginger (10 grams)

Garlic (5 big cloves)

Salt

Water...one cup..

To make curry paste

Make a paste of ginger and garlic and keep it aside.

Cut the bamboo shoots into small sizes of 1 cm each. Measure a 1 tablespoon bamboo shoot and keep it aside. Use the bamboo-shoot water minimally.

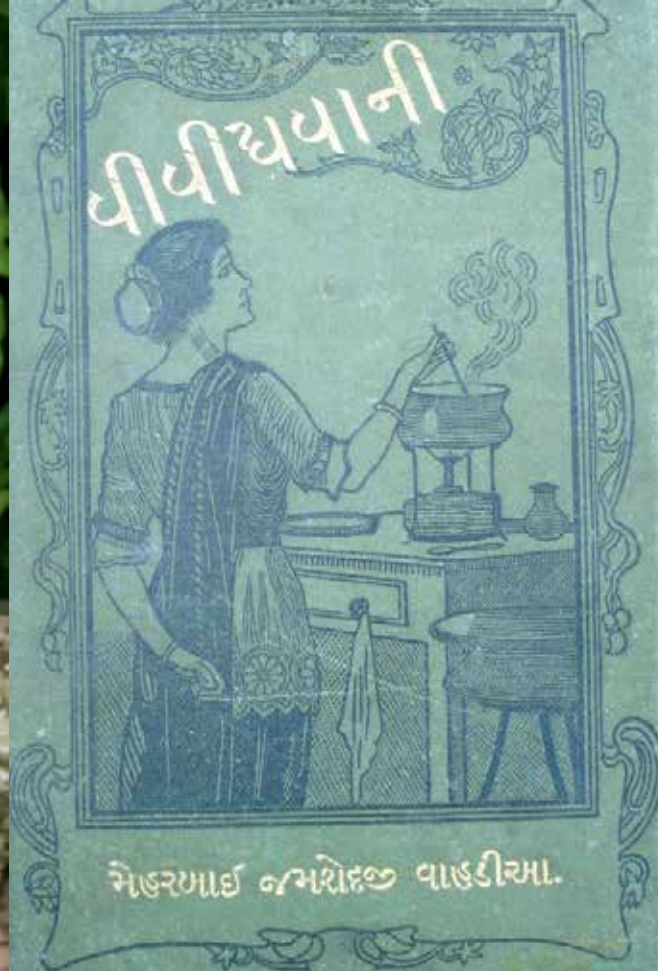
Preparation

Cut the pork into medium sized pieces and place it in a cooking pot. Add salt to it and enough water to immerse the pork. In a medium-high flame, cook the meat and salt for 30 minutes or until the pork is half cooked. Add the bamboo-shoot along with its water and stir the mixture until dry. Add some water and cook the meat until it is cooked or the water is almost dry. Add in the ginger and garlic paste, pepper (10-15 flowers) and chilli powder and stir for about 2-3 minutes. (Make sure there is just enough water in the dish so that it does not burn.) Add some more water and let it boil for another 5 minutes. The curry formed should be medium thick. Serve hot with rice.

I hope you enjoy cooking and eating this as much as I have enjoyed writing it! Bon Appetit.



A Child just after the Navjote ceremony carries a coconut, used in the ritual and signifying blessings



Vividhoani – A Parsi woman's heirloom cookbook

almonds and cashew are ground with coconut and other Indian spices to make the Parsi curries, which accompany the afternoon rice meal in a Parsi home. Nuts and raisins are also fried and sprinkled over rice pulao and other savory and sweet dishes.

The Parsis were those Persians who fled from the port of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf around 936 AD from religious persecution by Arab invaders. Food starts the Parsi story in India – when Jadi Rana, as told in the *Kisseh-e-Sanjan* narrative, gave a bowl full of milk to the priest who had come to ask for refuge in his kingdom, the wise priest carefully stirred in a spoon full of sugar. Thus the Parsis would act like ‘Sugar in the Milk’ of India, sweetening and strengthening the life of their adopted land while not letting it ever overflow. Jadi Rana, impressed by this symbolism granted the Parsis refuge and freedom of worship and life. As can be seen from this myth and in real life, the Parsis brought from Persia their fondness for a touch of sweetness even in their savory and spiced preparations, a preference they discovered, that they even shared with their Gujarati neighbours. Khata –Meetha, meaning sweet and sour is a term by which Parsis are identified.

What is Parsi food and what are its origins? Food is intimately associated across India with religious identity. Food is an offering made as ‘Chasni’ in Parsi fire temples and homes and accompanies prayers. Zoroastrianism gives great reverence to nature and its manifestations in fruit and flower accompany all rituals. A particularly auspicious significance is given to the pomegranate, which symbolizes immortality and abundance and is therefore always part of the Chasni.

Fish is auspicious, often used today, symbolically in silver representations in ritual implements. Standing for fertility and abundance it is also specially made as ‘Mava ni macchi’, sweet meats in the form of fish, which are presented on family occasions of happiness particularly at Navjotes and marriages.

For the Zoroastrian, food is sustenance to strengthen mankind in the battle against evil. There is no fasting or abstention, because unlike other religions of India both the material and the spiritual are equally important in the Zoroastrian tradition. Pain or depriving the body of nourishment is a sin and fasting is strictly prohibited. In

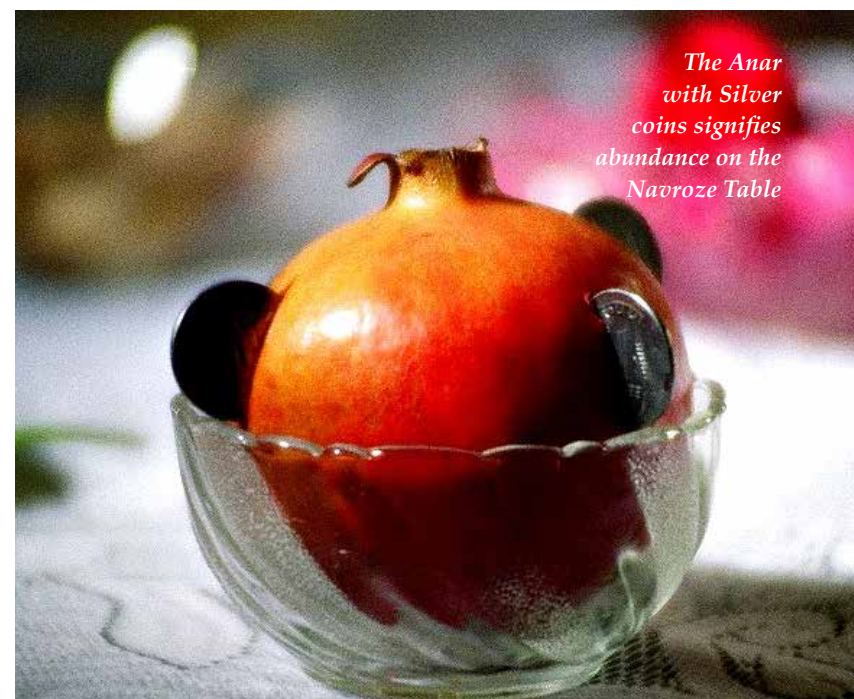
Khata Meetha A Descriptive Account of Parsi Food

Shernaz Cama & Vanshika Singh

The recent discovery by the general public in India of Parsi food is heart - warming and also a sign that Indians are now ready to experiment with different aspects of their country's vast cuisine. Parsi culture is an amalgamation of East and West; in dress and food influences come from their origins in ancient Persia, their links with China

and the strong influences of the Gujarat coast as well as European culture.

The spices used in this food reflect a combination of dry fruits and nuts available abundantly in Iran, with the coconut and spices of Gujarat and Goa. Dry fruits like



At the Agharni a woman's sari pallu is filled with the ladvo, coconut and other symbols of joy and blessing



Ravo and Sev served at all auspicious occasions



Parsi Poro



Dhansak Dal served with brown rice

this 'Religion of the Good Life', food plays an important role. It is closely intertwined with the entire life of the Parsi, beginning even before birth.

In the 8th month of pregnancy the Agharni ceremony, performed for the expectant mother, has central to it the Agharni no ladvo. Its conical form and almonds, dates and dry fruits come from the Iranian tradition; the sweet ladoo comes from the Indian tradition. This ladvo is fed to unmarried women in the gathering, in the belief that marriages will quickly follow.

This ceremony is followed by a typical feast, which will include ravo (sweet semolina with rose water flavor), sev

(sweet vermicelli with dry fruit), white rice and modi (plain or pure), dal- called tuvar in Gujarati and known as arhar across the rest of India. Fish dishes will accompany such family gatherings, but a European addition will be present in the form of a baked dish or a specially made savory pastry with some form of chicken or meat.

This feasting finds its zenith in the famous Parsi 'Lagan nu Bhonu'. Anyone who has witnessed the rows of white linen draped tables, shining green banana leaves, and huge silver serving dishes being carried to serve exquisitely dressed and bejeweled ladies and gentlemen at a Parsi wedding feast understands how important feasting is in this culture.

This is one tradition, which believes that feasting not fasting is the way to appreciate the Spenta (bountiful) creation that is, this world. Spread on palm leaves instead of plates, with silver cutlery and white linen napkins, this feast can include up to twenty dishes and will always have the special lamb pulao with dhansak dal. Made out of a combination of up to eight types of dal, it includes vegetables, meat as well as special spices, which create a dish unmatched in flavour and subtlety.

A favourite during this special menu is the Patra ni maachi or green coconut chutney wrapped with banana leaves around steamed pomfret fish. The chutney comes from the traditions of the Gujarat coast, while pomfret is a fish valued both by the Zoroastrians of India and Iran.

The death rites of a Zoroastrian also involve food. For three days after death, the hearth fire is not to be lit and the family is to be fed by the neighbours. For these three days they observe parhizi or abstinence from any form of meat. On the fourth day, when it is believed the soul or Urvan has entered paradise or garotheman, a special day of feasting is observed. Eggs are ubiquitous in Parsi food and the day starts with a poro or Parsi omlette, malido- a sweet and bhakra- a sweet fermented with toddy. The afternoon meal would include the favourite dishes of the

departed soul and on this day of charum and dhansak is always made. Some believe that this is the reason dhansak is always eaten by the family gathering every sunday, in order to commemorate ones ancestors.

Apart from life cycle rituals, special calendar days dedicated to divine beings are also celebrated with food and reverence. On the 'birthday' of fire- adar mahino, adar roj, each household specially decorates the kitchen with images of blessing, made of turmeric and kumkum paste, over and on the stove. The six ghanbars or festivals of the seasons are occasions where the entire community comes together and each area has a specialty dish, prepared on huge log fires even today.

The Iranian New year falls on 21st March, the Spring Equinox, symbolizing the arrival of spring and the rejuvenation of the land and its offering of grain, fruits and vegetables. On this day, falooda, a rich milk drink flavored with rose water is prepared for the special Navroze table set up even today across Iran, Central Asia and Parsi homes in India, welcoming the new season with a symbolic gathering of the fruits of the earth. Most people of the Middle East are meat eaters and the Parsis never could succumb to vegetarianism, even during their sojourn in Gujarat, a vegetarian strong hold. No Parsi meal would



A traditional Parsi Lagan-nu-bhonu



Patra ni maachi



be complete without a meat, fish, chicken or egg dish. What perhaps distinguishes their non-vegetarian preparations are that the meat, chicken and eggs are cooked with vegetables, potatoes, green peas, spinach etc. once again showing a multicultural bias.

The preparation of Parsi food is not simple in the modern world, perhaps this is what led to the creation across Gujarat and Bombay and later to

the Deccan and Karachi, of Zoroastrian Stree Mandals. These were women's organizations, where for now almost one hundred years, special dishes such as dar ni pori, date ghari, bhakra, malido and other complex dishes with ingredients which need special treatment and skill, have been prepared by women trained in the craft of Parsi food. In most Parsi areas or baughs, even today, women are economically employed by personal sale of not just this food but regular Parsi meals or dabbas. These are of great help in a demographically aging community, where often there are no young people to help prepare food for the elderly. The Ratan Tata Institute (RTI) and Parsi Amelioration Cooperative (PAC) have become important destinations not just for Parsis but for all those in Bombay who enjoy clean, freshly prepared Parsi dishes in an ambience of cheerful hospitality.

The RTI is a charitable enterprise of the Tata family started by Sir Ratan Tata, son of the founder, Jamsetji Tata. Inaugurated in 1929, the RTI celebrated its Platinum Jubilee in 2005; 75 years of commitment to help the less

fortunate and disadvantaged women within the Parsi community and later all Indian women, by training them to make special Parsi food. The goal is to offer a life of dignity, which is not dependent on charity. It has an outlet with a huge kitchen on Hughes Road in South Mumbai. The organization has Parsi and non-Parsi employees many who have spent a lifetime working with the RTI. They provide reasonably priced Parsi meals to many homes across Mumbai thus helping the elderly and the infirm.

At the RTI and in Parsi food the menu seem unusual because the herbs of the Iranian plateau mingle with the condiments of India creating Parsi Cuisine. The Parsis, as stated, are an intercultural amalgam; therefore the language too, in the menu is often an amalgamation of two languages. A Parsi lamb roast, marinated in dahi (yoghurt) and spices was influenced by the English roast meat while baked dishes in white sauce and English sweet dishes such as the bread and butter pudding, caramel custard, cakes and blancmanges became part of Parsi food. The famous 'lagan nu custard', served at weddings is an exotic blend of the bland English pudding with dry fruit, eggs, cardamom and other rich ingredients.



Eggs and rice combine Middle Eastern & Asian Traditions of fertility on the Navroze table



Traditional Navroze tables & a glass of falooda

It is speculated that Parsi men invited to a meal in an English home (in the early years women did not go out much) would describe the food to their wives and thus would result the Parsi version of some famous English dishes. One such was the baked fish in béchamel sauce which became the 'machi no saas', fish in a tangy white sauce, popular at weddings and parties.

So many English dishes became a part of Parsi cuisine, that the classic Parsi cookery book, written by Mehrerbai Jamshedji Nusserwanji Wadia, 'Vivid Vani', written in two volumes during the late 19th century, has a total of 2050 recipes, out of which 700 are English. The Parsi 'estew' is English stew, changed to suit a palate more used to spices. The Parsi 'cutlace' is the western cutlet enormously changed by the use of spices and enough eggs to make a doctor wince.

Parsi food tends to be regarded as 'rich'. It is seen as a cuisine of the affluent, making use of expensive ingredients, dried fruit, apricots and extensive use of meats. However cooking for the household is normally simpler but is still regarded as a very important component of daily life.

Irani food, which came with the Zoroastrians who migrated across land in the 19th and early 20th century,

relies a lot on bakery products. Historically, baking was an art, which had Iranian roots but was modified for the market by shrewd Parsi enterprise. Manufacturing units run by private family businesses came into being with the setting up of European 'factories' across Gujarat. One such family of which the sixth generation continues the baking tradition is the Dotivalas of Surat.

The Dotivalas are descendants of Mr. Faramji Pestonji Dotivala, who learnt to make breads from Dutch traders. The bread he made was fermented with toddy, to prevent it from spoiling on long sea journeys. If left unsold, it would become dry, with a light and crispy texture, which was sold cheaply to the poor. Faramji innovated making small round baked biscuits, which have today become the famous 'Farmasu surti batasa'. For over three centuries the Dotivala biscuits, now identified as Parsi biscuits, have included the Surti batasa, the Nankhatai, and the Irani biscuits. While their forte was fermenting the dough with toddy, a drink much favored by Parsis, introduction of prohibition in Gujarat took away that option. To recreate this crisp original, the Dotivalas again innovated to get the same result. The light salty version, popular in Irani teashops, came to be known as Irani biscuits. Thus, sweet and salty Parsi biscuits have pioneered the baked goods industry in India.



Jam tarts being prepared at the RTI, Mumbai



An unusual favourite is Fried Bombay duck or Boomla



Mr. Jamshed Dotivala and his son Cyrus Dotivala, Surat

Irani Cafes, starting out as places where the ordinary man could enjoy tea and brun maska, a special bun lavishly slathered with butter became meeting places of intellectuals and then languished before their current revival. These were situated in triangular locations bought cheaply because such locations were considered inauspicious by the local population. They were sensitive to the Indian context and there are often boards and menus stating that beef and pork products are not sold on their premises.

Today the Berry Pulao of Britannia Restaurant is famous, while Leopold is a regular gathering place of young back packers who come in for their substantial and reasonable food. Britannia, located at Ballard estate, is deliberately maintained as a part of the lost British Empire. Mr. Baman Kohinoor at 92, personally entertains his customers. Old

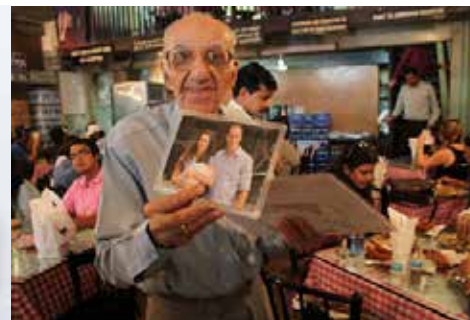
colonial nostalgia, portraits of Queen Elizabeth and three flags - Iranian, British and the Indian Tricolour grace its walls. These flags epitomize the hybrid culture of these people.

Mr. Kohinoor in an interview explained 'The Iranian flag represents my roots, the British flag represents the patronage given to the Parsis for, which reason we are affluent today and the Indian flag, represents my country'.

Today an international outcry on social media, accompanies even a rumour of one of them closing down. When the famous Parsi Dairy Farm, seemed in danger of closing down its shutters, thousands appealed to the management, while there was an outcry from the community who could not imagine life without a Parsi Dairy Mava Kulfi. Kayani



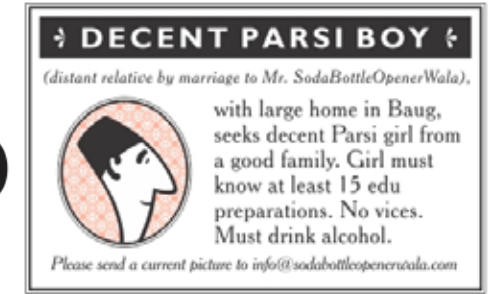
Tea and Brun Maska



Mr. Kohinoor celebrates the birth of Prince George. Britannia's Berry Pulao



Sodabottleopenerwala, Bangalore



Quirky Advertisements attract customers

bakery of Pune is renowned all over the world and its famous shrewsbury and ginger biscuits are so popular that only 'one box for one person', is a rule. There is no question of commercializing or bigger premises, the taste and quality lie in stringent family control and personal care is taken in the making of each product.

A young face, Anahita Dhondy, has become the face of the coming of age of Parsi food as up market, fashionable food and a place to be seen in. The Sodabottleopenerwala Restaurants, started by the chain run by A. D. Singh of Olives, has not only conquered Gurgaon, Delhi, Bangalore but has now entered even the home of Parsi cooking - Bombay itself. The Restaurant revival is only one part of the commercialization of Parsi food.

Parsis were one of the earliest communities to use food, not only as a place for philanthropy and women's economic growth, but also for commercial catering. In Bombay several dozen caterers are keenly sought and a joke in Parsi circles is that the first question on receiving a Navjote or Wedding invitation is the question 'Who is going to be the caterer'. In a tiny community these caterers are busy during the season September to March and each one has adapted to new circumstances by enlarging their repertoire of dishes or adding cocktails, serving Coca Cola

rather than Dukes' raspberry and grape drink and other new innovations. It is interesting that the market is now driving Parsi food back to its roots. Several famous Chefs are touring Parsi Gujarat and the Deccan to unearth hand written recipes and keep one step ahead of the competition.



A tiered Wedding Cake is a must at all Parsi Weddings

Parsi food is thus a symbol of a community that has been willing to change and adjust to new circumstances across history and geography. Despite this, it is obvious that Parsi cuisine is an important marker of ethnic identity.

Today, across the cities in USA and Canada, FEZANA-The Federation of Zoroastrian Anjumans of America, runs cookery competitions and the more authentic food, the better. Thus, Parsi food now spans the world from Australia to Alaska and this tiny community celebrates its culture with others in the most ancient form of fellowship – that of breaking bread together.

Bhicoo Manekshaw's the community's best-known culinary expert, personified within her work and writings the varying influences that has created Parsi cuisine.

While she has received her training in continental cookery, she has also done intensive research on the history and development of Parsi cuisine by traveling to the heartland of Gujarat where a substantial majority of families who maintain the old traditions of Parsi cooking reside. Her book, *The Essential of Parsi Cookery*, (Penguin Books, India, 1996) is a treasure house of recipes and customs that define the Parsi way of life.

Bhicoo was brought up in a traditional Parsi home in Bombay, where all customs and traditions were observed and celebrated. Bhicoo relates how Goan food has been incorporated into Parsi cuisine.

"After coming home from the market, each day, our Goan cook would, prepare Goa curry. It would be ready by 11 am, so that whenever any servant had any time they would go to the kitchen and help themselves to it. This Goa curry became a part and parcel of many Parsi homes, because children like me were practicably brought up on it by our ayahs".

Many years later, when Bhicoo's husband, Air Vice Marshal J. F. Manekshaw was posted in London, she continued to develop her love of food. Bhicoo wanted to do the advance certificate of the famous Cordon Bleu School in London.

She was told that there was no vacancy for a year as they took only ten pupils at a time in that Course. Bhicoo asked the Principal if she would just go through the manuscript of her first book, "Traditional Recipes of India", which she had just finished writing, as she was not sure if it was worth publishing.

After going through the script, the Principal told her that she should publish it and asked her to give a cookery demonstration. Parsi cuisine came to the fore. Bhicoo gave a demonstration of papata ma murghi (chicken with potatoes) and kera pur enda (eggs on bananas). She was accepted on the course as the eleventh pupil.

As Advisor to the India International Centre, Bhicoo prepared meals for the highest in the land. Indira Gandhi, with her Parsi connections loved this food as did many of the VVIPs whom Bhicoo served, showcasing Indian diversity.



*Bhicoo Manekshaw
in a traditional Parsi Gara*

Rajasthani Cuisine

Gayatri Singh

Along with its monuments, sculptures and other tangible artefacts of a rich civilization, ancient India developed an amazing variety of incomparable cooking techniques. Some of the most fascinating originated from the various princely states in the area that is today called Rajasthan.

The Maharajas of these states prided themselves on their fine master cooks, their unique foods, their food advisors (who were considered to be doctors), and their intricate methods of cooking. Prized recipes were closely guarded secrets. The refined and esoteric recipes of the royal courts, however, all grew from a vast store of knowledge developed over centuries throughout the region.

Our ancient cooks operated under the strictures of a highly sophisticated culinary science. And it was indeed a science. The basic rules were that similar added to similar increases, while similar added to its opposite reduces. Keeping this in mind, six primary tastes were identified: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. Foods were further identified by their effect on the body, either as heat producing or as cooling.

Sweets, milk or fruit based recipes, for instance, increase mucus content and have a cooling action. On the other hand, ginger, garlic, black pepper and chilies are heat producing. As the summer approached, the food advisors would warn against foods that were unwise to consume. At all times, they would instruct that some foods would be beneficial if eaten during the day, but unwise to take (and not digestible) after sunset; indeed, possibly poison at night. The rules were many and precise. Today they have been confirmed by modern medical science but our

ancestors knew them long before Google appeared on the scene.

Rich foods predominated in the winter. Breads soaked in butter melted in the mouth and were eaten after dainty portions of meat, served with raw onions, green chilies and lemon. Vegetables were scarce; those that were available were all grown locally and dried for use throughout the year. Perhaps because of the difficulty of growing vegetables in the desert, meats were plentiful and cooked in numerous ways.

The methods of cooking in ancient Rajasthan were creative, adapted to both the climate and the available resources. The most common were:

Clay Baking. Foods were marinated and mixed, then wrapped in muslin cloth, clad with clay and baked in coal.

Stone Roasting - A flat slab of stone was placed on blazing coal. Once hot, it would work as a grill and food placed upon it would be roasted.

Pit Cooking - A pit was dug, layered with wood and blazing coal. Food was placed in the pit and then covered with coal, leaving a "breathing pipe." At times grain was kneaded into dough and baked in the pit. Food was sometimes wrapped in leaves of a particular tree -- such as flame of the forest -- or rice was packed in lotus leaves and cooked on the top layer of coal.

Dum (steaming) - Food would be sealed with dough; ensuring that moisture could not escape and that both flavour and aroma would be trapped within.

Bhagar- was a method of enhancing boiled food. Spice was added to a few spoons of heated ghee, taking advantage of the ability of ghee (or oil) to extract both aroma and flavour from the spices and herbs.

Dhungar (smoking) - A few drops of ghee were drizzled over a flaming coal and then placed in the dish containing the food, which was then tightly covered. The smoke could not escape and would permeate the entire dish.

The origins of the techniques are buried in antiquity, but they still survive throughout Rajasthan. In a desert village, a clay pot will be broken and a piece of the pottery thrust down into the simmering food, which is then tightly covered. The entire dish will be permeated by a delicate smokiness from the piece of clay.

At the other end of the spectrum, a guest of the royal family may be served hare that has been encased in pastry and cooked in a pit below ground, before being taken out and presented as a great delicacy.

From these simple yet subtle techniques, creativity soared into truly fantastic realms. A recipe of which my grandmother was especially proud, involved an individual baingan (aubergine) plant.

Apart from the vegetables hanging on the branches the rest of the plant was covered in clay, each baingan slit and stuffed with spices, then roasted while still on the branch. Before serving, the clay was washed and guests presented with a living plant from, which they could pluck and eat a perfectly cooked jewel of a vegetable.

These things are a strong and important part of our heritage and should be documented and preserved so that we do not lose them.

RECIPES

JUNGLEE MAANS

Ingredients:

- 1 kg. meat
- 1/4 kg ghee
- handful of whole dry red chillies
- salt to taste

In a pot heat the ghee; add the whole red chillies and salt. Stir a couple of times and add the meat. Simmer, covered on low heat till water evaporates, then add more water to further cook the meat. Stir occasionally. The dish is ready once the meat is tender.

KALIA RASALA

Ingredients:

- 1 kg meat
- 1/4 kg sliced onions
- 1/4 kg green chillies (whole and slit)
- 100 gms fresh coriander
- 1/4 kg hung curd
- 1/4 kg ghee
- salt to taste

Mix all the ingredients in a pot and let it stand for half an hour.

Then put on low heat, and simmered covered.

Stir occasionally, checking to see if meat is tender.

Serve on chappati