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Sanskarika

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Azadi Ka
Amrit Mahotsav

CUISINE

A MOUTHFUL OF MAGNIFICENCE



The king of royal cuisine, the biryani is not just an alchemy of rice, meat and a melange of spices – it is a legend, a legacy and luxury unparalleled

The biryani, a morsel of which evokes memories and stories of culinary heritage unmatched, continues to be one of the most diverse and interesting dishes to woo every palate. The royal Mughal offering has nearly 26 different varieties strewn across the length and breadth

of India, each with its distinctive identity, flavours and narratives. Today, experiments have multiplied the iterations manifold, giving the classic recipes a contemporary twist.

Arguably India's finest gastronomic offering to the world – including the Middle East that gave India the pilaf – biryani is not just a dish with royal patronage but the Arabian Nights of the gourmet globe where



one story concludes only to give way to another. Take for instance, the Calcu'a biryani. Created in the kitchen of Wajid Ali Shah during his exile, it was developed from the fragrant saffron yakhni of the Mystic Feast. It is believed that during the exile, Shah's meat allowance was greatly reduced such that serving a good portion of biryani, which then was a ratio of three meat pieces per spoon, was getting increasingly difficult. In order for it to appear aptly filling, the chief chef plopped a boiled egg into the dish and added spices to give it a meat-like taste. Wajid Ali loved the addition and thus was born the first biryani. Of course, the egg then was coated with a layer of chicken and fried well.

One more remarkable story is that of the Kathal biryani of the Mathur Kayasthas, the pre-Mughal residents

of Old Delhi. History has it that the first tahiri, which evolved into Sabz biryani, was first created to feed the community along with other innovations like dal ki kaleji and dal ka keema where lentils were used to recreate meaty flavours. Particularly popular with the then Queen of Bhopal, Begum Qudisa, the mildly-flavoured Gosht biryani is said to be inspired by the Moradabadi biryani that used yakhni (meat broth) to flavour rice. Anthropologists also hold that the famous Lucknow dum biryani was inspired by the Mappila biryani, where the meat and rice were cooked individually using a parda (curtain) before they were layered and presented to the workers building the Bara Imambara. It was here that Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula is said to have discovered the now famous dum style of cooking,

which eventually made the Lucknow biryani famous.

It may be largely believed that the Mughals are to be thanked for this innovation, but some theories suggest that the biryani first landed on our shores with the Arabs in Kerala years before the Mughals made India their home. Biryani first finds reference in 2AD as a fragrant rice dish called oon soru in Tamil literature, and closely matched the description of Mumtaz Mahal's creation in later. Biryani, which comes from the Persian word birian meaning "fried before cooking", was traditionally cooked by tossing the rice in ghee before boiling it to al dente and then layering it with separately cooked/ fried meat and infusing it with rose and saffron. This was also how oon soru was made albeit the rice grains were pearl-shaped, and spices like turmeric, coriander, pepper and bay leaf were added.

The Mughal biryani was called pilaf for a long time. In fact, Ain-e-Akbari, which has a generous segment on the eating ethos of the royals, makes no difference between biryani and pilaf which came from the Ottoman Empire. King Darius is often credited to have created the modern-day pilaf as we know by using fragrance like rose, mace, cardamom and cinnamon which eventually became the framework for biryanis. Legend has it that even Mumtaz Mahal used

a similar style along with the meat basting technique used in kebabs to keep the biryani moist, so it did not need any accompaniments. Although celebrated travel historian Al-Biruni, in his travelogue, mentions biryani-alikes in India relished by many kings even earlier, it was the Mughals who popularised the dish here by making it a military essential.

Can one assume then that the Mopla Kozhi biryani or Thalassery biryani is the oldest member of the biryani book? Anthropologists believe that could have been the case, given the way Mappila biryani is cooked which is by the use of dum – an art that existed before the Mughals popularised the form – and the short-grained rice called jeerakashala, which gives the dish its aroma. However, food historians bracket the birth of biryani between mid-1500 to mid-1600.

Other models suggest it was the pilaf that evolved into biryani, and going by the diary of empress Noor Jahan, the name was given to distinguish the vegetarian fare from the non-vegetarian. Through that period, biryani was often garnished with fried onions and mint while pilaf came generously garnished with rose or pomegranate. The use of i'tar (perfume) was introduced by the queen to mask the meaty aroma so the Hindu nobles could eat along with the king.

Another quintessential favourite is the Hyderabad biryani, created after Aurangzeb appointed Niza-ul-Mulk as the new ruler of Hyderabad. It was Kacchi biryani perfected, and it led to the creation of almost 50 different recipes of biryani that could be made with fish, shrimp, quail and deer meat. The Kalyani Biryani, a legacy from the Kalyani Nawabs of Bidar (Karnataka), popularised the use of cubed beef and tomato-coriander flavour in biryani. Peshawari biryani, on the other hand, illustrated the use of red and white beans, Kabuli chana, black gram and green peas with cashew nuts, almonds, rose water and saffron to add a rich amalgamation of flavours.

It may be known as an indulgence of the nawabs, but some of the best versions of this Arabic dish come from the south, be it Ambur biryani which is cooked with Seeraga

Samba rice, a traditional Tamil Nadu variety akin to the Arborio rice and lends a rich risotto-kind richness to the dish or the Dindigul curry biryani where the curry is used to flavour the rice before the meat is added. It was Calicut biryani, a favourite of Tipu Sultan, which introduced the art of serving biryani with vinegar-soaked pickles and papads fried in coconut oil, followed by the tomato-rich Bohri biryani that was served with beaten curd and rock salt.

"Biryani is a great culinary equaliser. The rich, the famous, the royal and the commoners love it, yet it is not served to guests," noted the Portuguese priest Fra Sebastian Manrique while visiting the royal courts of India. A hundred years later, the king of Indian royal cuisine retains its status, loved by all and served to all!



Events Calendar – April 2023

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Friday
7.00 am

Monthly Lecture Series – 132

Online lecture

On the occasions of Hanuman jayanti

Yoga of Mahaveer

by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India

19

Wednesday
7.00 am

Monthly Lecture Series – 133

Online lecture

On the occasion of world Liver day

Yoga for Healthy liver

by Ajay Kumbhar, Yoga Expert from India

21

Wednesday
6.00 pm

Sanskriti Sandhya Series – 45

Hindustani classical vocal recital

by 'Shashtravedi visharada' Dinidu Muthunayaka

Visiting Lecturer at the University of Visual and
Performing Arts

Venue: SVCC Auditorium

24

Monday
10.00 am onwards

**Sinhala Tamil new year
celebrations**

28

Friday
6.00 pm

Sanskriti Sandhya Series – 46

Hindustani Vocal Recital

by Doctor Wijedasa Bandara

Venue: SVCC Auditorium

Free Events. All are cordially invited.

We Conduct

CLASSES on

**Bharatha Natyam, Kathak, Sitar,
Violin, Tabla, Carnatic Vocal,
Hindustani Vocal, Yoga
and Hindi**



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