

HYDERABADI CUISINE

The city of Hyderabad, famous for its minarets and pearl-bazaars, is the capital city of the state of Andhra Pradesh, a bustling 400-year-old metropolis of some 6 million. Long renowned as the seat of the fabulously wealthy *Nizams* (rulers) who patronized expert artisans, famous for piercing and stringing pearls, it is a historic urban center that brings to mind romance and fabulous wealth. Like most of India's cities, it is a blend of fairytale and reality, a hodge-podge of old and new, forming an exotic background for its much sought after delightful cuisine.

Asaf Jahi, one of the viceroys of the Mughal Empire in the 16th century, broke away to establish his own independent state. Thereafter his descendents gave themselves the title *Nizam*. In 1798, a military and political alliance was signed between the *Nizam* and the British, which continued until India became independent. During these centuries, the city developed an unique cultural and culinary heritage, which remains well preserved.

Today, the people of Hyderabad are noted for their culture, artistic abilities and certain sophistication in manners. The fifth largest cosmopolitan city in India, it is a city of oriental glory, reminiscent of the great days of Indo-Muslim culture. It is well known for its hospitality and visitors to the city have always found a pleasant welcome and fine foods on which to dine.

India's finest cuisine was developed, from the 15th to the 19th centuries, in the courts of the Mughal Emperors, who raised cooking to an art form. Today, in all parts of India and beyond, it is offered as that country's royal food. The rich kitchen of these refined aristocrats included a fusion of the indigenous culinary traditions, which had been nurtured for almost 3,000 years by the Vedic and Aryan people, with the foods of Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan and the Turkish nations - later enhanced by including European touches. Being an offshoot of the Mughals, the *Nizams* of Hyderabad were a party to this development of a fine distillation of taste.

The Mughal court food and India's predominant Hindu culture formed the basis of the kitchen of the *Nizams*. This cuisine, combining the Muslim Mughal cooking court with the historic foods of the country, produced a kitchen that was to become the definition of fine dining.

Even though vegetables are the king of foods in India, Mughal cuisine often includes goat and lamb, served in a variety of ways, as melt-in-the-mouth *kababs*, roasted, barbecued, or in curries. Even though India has a whole series of cow-protection movements, Hyderabad boasts of its delicious dishes of beef. Nevertheless, as a whole, other than lamb and chicken, Mughal food is mostly vegetarian, containing lentils, peas, and beans, heavily spiced.

From the centuries of Mughal food evolution, Hyderabad, in our times, is famous for the distinctive aroma and taste of its *Biryani*, a dish of rice and mutton or chicken. Travellers have written that in the past a typical Hyderabadi feast would have no less than 26 different varieties of *Biryani* a dish which has the reputation of being an aphrodisiac.

Perhaps, equal to this rice dish, for Hyderabadis, is *Haleem*, a much sought after dish during the holy month of Ramadan. A succulent dish of meat, wheat, ghee, cooked to a porridge-like consistency, its name *Haleem* literally means patience, because it takes long hours to prepare.

From the hundreds of other Hyderabadi delicacies are: *kulcha*, with a legend that adds romance to its flavor, *Baghare Baigan*, a tasty eggplant dish; and *sherwanis*, *Pattar ka Gosh*, *Korma*, *Pakodas*, and *Salans*, all with special enticing aroma and mouthwatering flavors. Other favorites are *Vadas*, delicious doughnuts dunked in steaming hot *sambar*; deep-fried rice flour *Murku*, and steamed rice dumplings, called *Idli*.

As a fitting end to the meal, one can savor *Payasam*, a pudding made with rice and milk, *Kubani ke Meetha*, an apricot dessert served with whipped cream, almond flavored *Badam Kajali*, *Sheer Khurma*- a delicacy of dry fruits and dates, an exotic range of *Halwas* and the elaborately prepared *paan*.

Hyderabad's dedication to fine dining has been unwavering for many centuries, especially among the upper classes. Throughout the centuries, the *Nizams* of Hyderabad were famed for their sumptuous feasts and their love for fine dining. One of these rulers, *Nizam Mir Osman Ali*, called the Patron Saint of Hyderabadi cuisine, even created his own dishes - still cooked today.

Under the patronage of the *Nizams*, the cooks of Hyderabad devoted themselves to sharpening their culinary talents with the subtle blending of spices and emphasizing the fiery chilli. In the process, they created an amazing range of superb dishes. Much to the delight of food lovers, today, one can enjoy succulent historic Hyderabadi creations thanks to these clever chefs.

Hyderabadi Cuisine is a princely legacy of the Nizams, is a blend of Mughlai and Persian cuisines.

The use of ingredients is carefully chosen and cooked to the right degree and time. Utmost attention is given to picking the right kind of spices, meat, rice etc. Therefore, an addition of a certain herb, spice, condiment, or combination of all these add a distinct taste and aroma.

Traditional utensils made of copper, brass, earthen pots are used for cooking. All types of cooking involved the direct use of fire.

There is a saying in Hyderabad, cooking patiently or *ithmenaana se* is the key, slow-cooking is the hallmark of Hyderabadi cuisine.

HISTORY

A 400-year history is behind the culinary delights of Hyderabadi food. It evolved in the kitchens of the Nizams, who elevated food to a sublime art form. Hyderabad cuisine is highly influenced by the native telugu food where rice and spices are widely used to great effect.

In the good old days, the food was called *Ghizaayat*. The cuisine is linked to the nobles, who religiously maintain the authenticity of the past, and the recipes are a closely-guarded secret.

The royal cooks are known as *Khansamas*. They are highly regarded by the nobles.

Shahi Dastarkhan is the dining place, where food is served and eaten. A chowki is a low table, instead of a dining table and cotton mattresses for squatting and bolsters for the back rest. The Dastarkhan is revered in the noble household.

The herbs and spices used and the method of preparation give the dish their name.

On Formal occasions, the food is garnished with warq (a very fine, pure silver leaf created by prolonged hammering and flattening of a small piece of silver).

BIRYANI

Biryani is Hyderabad's most famous meat-and-rice dish. An authentic meal of Hyderabad invariably includes a Mutton Biryani. Chicken and vegetarian biryani are also popular. The Nizam's served some 26 varieties of Biryani for their guests.

TYPES OF BIRYANI

- Hyderabadi Biryani Lamb and Rice - A traditional celebration meal.
- Kachchi gosht ki biriyani - raw meat is stir fried with spices(masalas) for couple of minutes and then covered with rice and put on dum.
- Dum-pokht biryani - slow-cooked biryani.

SIDE DISHES

- Mirchi ka salan, Chilli Curry - accompanies a Biryani
- Dahi chutney, curd (not sweet) mixed with onions, green chillies.

HALEEM

Haleem is a seasonal delicacy of wheat & meat, and cooked for hours to a porridge-like paste. This traditional wheat porridge has its roots in Arabia, known as *harees*.

Haleem is a seasonal dish which is made during Ramzan (Ramadan).

The high calorie haleem is an ideal way to break the ramzan fast. Haleem means *patience*, because it takes long hours to prepare (often a whole day) and served in the evenings.

It is a popular starter at Muslim weddings.

CURRIES & STARTERS

- ◆ Bagara khana - Basmati rice delicacy.
- ◆ Baghara baingan - Stuffed Eggplants, a delicacy where tender and fresh brinjals are stuffed with ground peanut-coconut mixture and cooked in a rich and creamy paste.
- ◆ Dalcha - Mutton and Lentil delicacy.
- ◆ Murghi Korma - Chicken curry
- ◆ Hyderabad Kheema- A popular mutton-mince curry.
- ◆ Paaya
- ◆ Chakna - A dish made out of Goat intestines and tripe cooked with flour and other spices.
- ◆ Pathar-ka-Gosht - Mutton/lamb deep-fried on a stone slab found in Hyderabad.
- ◆ Dum-ka-Kheema
- ◆ Muthhi Key Kebabs - Meat balls (goat)
- ◆ Beja Fry - A goat's brain deep fried delicacy.
- ◆ Do Pyaaza - A curry made from lamb, onions, butter etc.
- ◆ Chugur Gosht - Lamb & Tender tamarind leaves curry.
- ◆ Boti Kabab - Minced meat delicacy.
- ◆ Bhuna Gosht
- ◆ Tamate ka Kut made with tomatoes
- ◆ Katti Dal
- ◆ Rawghani Roti - A type of Bread.
- ◆ Pasande Kabab
- ◆ Khagina
- ◆ Kabuli
- ◆ Nihari - A breakfast dish made of Goat's feet.

DESSERTS

- ◆ Qubani ka meetha(Khubani-ka-Meetha) - Apricot Pudding, Toppings with almond and cream. The original recipe is a translucent liquid.
- ◆ Double ka meetha- Bread Pudding topped with dry fruits, a derivative of mughlai dessert *Shahi tukre*.
- ◆ Gil e firdaus - Kheer made from kaddu.
- ◆ Sheer korma - Vermicelli Pudding - *Sheer* means Milk and *Korma* is a dry date fruit, is a celebration special dessert, specially made on the Ramzan day.
- ◆ Badam-ki-Jhab known as marzipan.
- ◆ Gaajar ka Halwa- Carrot Pudding
- ◆ Mauz-ka-Meetha - A Banana dessert.
- ◆ Firni - A Rice dessert.
- ◆ Faluda

SNACKS

- ◆ Lukhmi A typical Hyderabad starter and the snack's original and authentic preparation is stuffed with mutton-mince (kheema). "Kheemey ki Lukhmi" is still served as a starter in the authentic Hyderabad course of meal at weddings, parties, etc.
- ◆ Dil khush - A triangular pie, which is bread stuffed with cake leftovers
- ◆ Dil pasand
- ◆ Chota Samosa - A crispy, onion-filled small samosa.
- ◆ Osmania Biscuit - A nice, soft tea biscuit, gets its name after last ruler of Hyderabad, Mir Osman Ali Khan.
- ◆ Fine Biscuit - A multi-layered, oval shaped and sprinkled with sugar.