

# **MUGHLAI CUISINE**

Mughlai Cuisine is the cuisine that comes from the kitchens of the ancient Indian aristocracy or the Moghul Emperors. This cuisine is predominant in the Northern part of India. It has a strong influence of Muslim Cooking and some of the dishes retain their Muslim names - kebabs, kofta, pulao, biryani. Mughlai Cuisine is very "spice based" and has a distinctive aroma and taste of ground and whole spices. These spices are easily available in Indian Speciality shops all over the world.

Mughlai cuisine is one of the most popular cuisines, whose origin can be traced back to the times of Mughal Empire. Mughlai cuisine consists of the dishes that were prepared in the kitchens of the royal Mughal Emperors. Indian cuisine is predominantly influenced by the cooking style practiced during the Mughal era. Mughlai food is quite spicy and has a very unique aroma. On eating Mughlai food, one can get a feel of the ground spices. The spices used in the preparation of Mughlai food are easily accessible.

Mughlai food is especially preferred in Northern parts of the country. Some of the Mughlai dishes have Muslim names such as biryani, pulao, kebabs, kofta. This is suggestive of the strong influence of Muslim cooking style. The Mughals have truly left a long lasting influence on India, which is also reflected in the cuisine of India. Mughlai food occupies a commanding position in the popular cuisines of India.

The rich preparation of Mughlai food consisting of flavored sauces and butter based curries is so tempting that food lovers are bound to crave for more and more food. Mughlai food offers an amazingly delicious variety of food ranging from hot spicy shorba or soup to ginger based roasted meats to kulfi with rose petals sprinkled on it. Even, the names of the Mughlai food are so attractive that a person gets tempted to try out different dishes.

Though, Mughlai food is cooked in all parts of the country, but the best feel of this cuisine can be had only in Delhi, which specializes in the preparation of this royal cuisine. In the 16th century, India was invaded by Mughals, who introduced the exotic spices, nuts and fruits to India. Also, the Indians got an opportunity to learn new techniques of cooking. In the preparation of most of the Mughlai dishes, milk and cream is used liberally. Mughlai Biryanies, Pasandas, Kormas and Pulao are so enticing and yummy that people usually end up licking their fingers.

## **CUISINES OF DELHI**

Everyone in Delhi loves eating. When people in Bombay and Bangalore are either partying or drinking, Delhites are, you guessed it, eating.

Walk into any wedding, party or social occasion and you will see huge tables groaning under an astonishing array of mouthwatering – and sometimes nose-watering too – dishes emanating exquisite aromas and fragrance. Usually, in the Delhi social scene, a perfunctory 'hello' is followed by the hostess indicating to the guest where the food has been laid; just what the guest had been too polite to ask himself but was, of course, dying to know. An indifferent table is social suicide. On the other hand, feed a Delhiite well and you've got a friend for life; on a full stomach he will give you even unto half his kingdom. and what's more, being a thorough generous live-for-today Delhiite, won't even regret it the morning after.

Perhaps that is why Delhi is the restaurant capital of India, just like Bombay and Bangalore are the discotheque and pub hubs respectively. The city is crawling with restaurants of all variety, nationality and vintage.

## **The Rule of Successive Dynasties brought diverse Cuisine in the Capital**

Over the centuries, Delhi has changed hands, and hence personalities, umpteen times. She has been variously Rajput, Arab, Afghan, Mongol (Mughal), and English. The vivacious eat-well-drink-well Punjabis came to the city with literally nothing, having left everything behind, in what used to be home, in Pakistan when the partition happened. However in an amazingly short span of time they bounced back with their lives and careers back on track.

## **THE PUNJABI CUISINE**

The Punjabis love to experiment and try everything, there is a veritable splash of cuisines you can sample. Thai, Lebanese, Chinese, Israeli, Italian, Indonesian, Spanish, Mexican, French, Moroccan, Swiss and much, much more of the local Indian stuff. What the Delhites don't like, they amend. Like the famous Indian-Chinese, which is a Delhi product.

'Going out' in Delhi is usually associated with food. However that was not always so. Not very long ago, in fact right into the fabulous forties till before the coming of the Punjabis, orthodox Hindus in Delhi would not eat

food cooked outside the home, dismissing it as 'unclean'. Reading between the lines this meant they were not sure about the caste of the cook – Brahminist squeamishness, which was followed by a surprising aggressiveness by non-Brahmins castes like the kshatriyas, kayasthas and so on.

All that stopped very abruptly when one enterprising family of fleeing Punjabis from the Partition holocaust set up shop as a Tandoori (Punjabi-Mughal cuisine) eatery in the old City, near the Red Fort.

## **Mughal Reigns in Chandni Chowk**

However, to eat Mughlai cuisine like mother makes it there's still no place like the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's city, now called the Old Delhi. At places like the now almost legendary Karim's and Babu Khan's near Jama Masjid, Kallu's Halim near Gali Chitli Qabar and Nalli Nahari in Beradari, beyond Ballimaran, the art of making Mughlai food is just like it was in the good old days of the emperors. The reason for this is that most of the families who own these restaurants in Old Delhi are descendants of the royal cooks who used to serve in the kitchens of the Mughal emperors. They take fierce pride in having successfully preserved the culture of the Mughlai cuisine in face of the Tandoori onslaught.

## **Interesting Stories behind the Creation of New Dishes**

There are stories attached to most places and food in the city. Like the nahiri, a delicate beef stew which is painstakingly prepared overnight and served just-so now at Nali Nahiri and such places. Apparently during the reign of Shah Jahan, Delhi's water supply came from a canal in the middle of Chandini Chowk. The water of this canal became suspect for some reason so the doctors (hakims, in those times) got together and came up with a recipe for a beef stew with lots of red chilies which were supposed to have germ-killing properties. Whether that worked or not is not known, but we can tell the nahiri sure did. It is still a very popular dish in Delhi and other cities of Northern India, like Lucknow and Kanpur.

Chandini Chowk is still revered as the best place to sample foods from the Mughlai cuisine, be it main course dishes, sweets or snacks. In teeth of fierce competition from the fast-food brigade Chandini Chowk has managed to hang on tenaciously and determinedly to that unique charm from another era.

## **Chandni Chowk - An Age Old Wholesale Market**

Most of the shops in Chandini Chowk date from the previous century, and some, like the Ghantewala Halwai, are even older. Almost all the shops have been handed down from father to son and many of these businesses are now being managed by the fourth or fifth generation.

Chandini Chowk's merchants take fierce pride in their trade and wares, hence quality is of the essence. Some of them would even go to the pains of grinding their own spices rather than trusting shop-bought Masalas (mixtures of various spices). Most of the shops have their own (very) secret recipes (guarded like family heirlooms, no less). This makes it very interesting for the gourmet as no two places providing the same fare will have preparations that taste just the same.

## **Bazaar - The Traditional Eating Joint of Delhi**

The market has over the centuries become a little cramped for space and you might have to end up standing if you are planning to sample some of the exquisite stuff the eateries here offer.

Turn a corner here and you will reach the Paranthewali Gali. The layered parantha – a type of bread fried on a griddle and made without yeast – is said to have been officially brought to Delhi by the Punjabis, but unofficially it had been eaten in Delhi for ages. Evidence of this is simply the existence of the Mughlai parantha layered fried bread with eggs, and sometimes chicken and mutton, folded into it which used to be served to Mughal emperors. The Paranthewali Gali boasts of three families here who have been involved in the art of turning out paranthas as they should be and selling them for generations.

## **The Speciality of Ghantewala**

The oldest sweet shop in Delhi is the Ghantewala in Chandini Chowk, which went into business in 1790. Down the centuries, it has remained in the same family and is now in the hands of the eleventh generation. There's an interesting story behind how it got its name, Ghanta actually means a big clanging bell in Hindi. Legend goes that whenever the royal procession moved down this road, the emperor was in the habit of stopping here for a snack – a

habit that his elephant acquired too. Well, we all know how passionately fond of sweets elephants are, so of course came the day when he found the way to the shop himself. Apparently he refused to budge and kept on shaking its head until people rallied around with assorted sweets. The bells hanging from the elephant's neck would tinkle whenever the animal went into stubborn mode and shook his head. and from there came the shop's name – beat that! The Ghantewala Halwai is celebrated for its sohanhalwa, a sweet made from dry fruits, sprouts and sugar.

There is another Ghantewalah Shahi Halwai, now near the famous fountain in Old Delhi. It is owned by a part of the same family, which branched out somewhere down the line. This shop also does roaring business with its dry fruit, sohanhalwa, barfis and namkeens.

Chandini Chowk is justly famous for its chaat: a quintessentially Indian spicy snack with various ingredients, laced with lots of sauces. In shops like Natraj's Dahi Bhale (almost legendary for its chaat) and Chaatwallah you can still bange on some of the best chaat in Delhi.

## **Snack's Speciality**

Want to carry home a taste of India? Take back salty snacks or namkeens from places like Haldiram's or Bikaner's in Chandini Chowk. Mithais or sweets spoil easily and are usually good for a day or so only. While here you can, of course, try exquisite Imratis (a syrup-filled delicacy) at Kanwarji's, Rasmalai (a sweet made from milk and cream) at Bikaner's and for Bengali sweets you just can't beat Haldiram's.

## **The Cooler Delicacies**

Doing this Chandini-Chowk-Food-trail in the summer months is really, uh, not exactly the best way to go around it. But the good news is that there's lots of stuff to help you cool-off. After all Indians have been living in these conditions longer than anyone else, so they've perfected combat techniques for the heat.

After a hot walk you will find a traditional almond squash known as Tthandai, (available at Haldiram's) tremendously refreshing Or you can chill out with the areabri falooda (milk starch and rice noodles served with crushed ice), at Gianiji ka Falooda. By the way, you needn't worry about the water they use for making ice - these guys are extremely particular and manufacture it from filtered water.

## **Mughlai Specialities**

Now coming down to today after the medieval charms of Chandini Chowk.

Most five-star hotels offer excellent Mughlai-Tandoori-Frontier cuisine. Especially Bukhara in Maurya Sheraton where you can rub shoulders with any celebrity worth his/her name, including Hillary and Chelsea Clinton who pronounced its food as one of the best they had tasted. For Punjabi - Mughlai food the places to head for are the restaurants in Pandara Road Market, Karol Bagh and Connaught Place. Pindi and Gulati on Pandara Road and Kake da Hotel in Connaught Place have a large following, who flock to them almost every night. Mostly after dinner – didn't we tell you that Delhiites eat too much!

## **The Vegetarian Joints**

The hunt for a really good vegetarian joint in Delhi might be an eye-opener for all of you who think India is more vegetarian than thou. Traditional vegetarian food can best be tasted in the homes of Delhi's people. No restaurant in Delhi offers the variety and quality of vegetarian food that can even hope to match home-cooked food. There are some places which offer Marwari food, like Brijbasi at Katra Neel but, really, they are so far out that even old Delhiites will scratch their heads if asked about there whereabouts.

Mostly restaurants tend to exist on the assumption that cottage cheese and lentils smothered in cream and butter is all there is to vegetarian cuisine, which of course is quite untrue. The humble cottage cheese is laced with names like paneer-do piaza, paneer makhani, paneer pasanda and shahi paneer, but don't be surprised if they all taste the same.

Cholle bhature is the grand Punjabi favourite and everybody who comes to Delhi eats it at least once. One of the best places offering cholle bhature is Kwaliti in Connaught Place. Another Delhi staple is rajma-chawal, red kidney beans cooked with spices and tomatoes and served with rice. But no restaurant can make it quite like it's done at home.

## **Street Food Has Its Own Charm**

Street food is the grand old tradition in Delhi from the times when Kkhomchewallahs (street vendors) used to come to one's doorstep to sell all kinds of snacks, chaats, ice creams, sweets and so on. The munchies you can buy off the streets vary with the season. It's fresh roasted Bhuttes (corn) in the rains, peanuts and popcorn in winter and various roasted gram in summer. You can also buy assorted Pakores (patties), patties, sandwiches and even the local version of a burger off these vendors.

## **International Cuisines of Delhi**

For those who want it, international cuisine is marks its presence in places like the Orient Express at the Taj Palace. Italian and Tex-Mex food, perhaps because of its affinity to Indian food, is very popular in Delhi and there are some very good joints like Flavors (owned by an Italian) and Rodeo. of course as far as five-star hotels are concerned you can have any cuisine from Thai to Spanish to Indonesian to Greek.

## **All's well that End is Sweet**

Go anywhere in Delhi there's no escaping the omnipresent sweet shop. The Punjabi and Mughlai sweets are rather in-your-face but those who like their sweets delicate might prefer the Bengali variety. No one can beat Annapoorna, the oldest authentic Bengali sweet shop in Delhi, which has outlets in Green Park and Chittaranjan Park. Other good mithai outlets are Kaleva in Gole Market, Nathu's and Bengali Sweets in Bengali Market.

## **Kulfi Speciality - An Indian Ice-Cream**

And if you haven't tried the typical Delhi kulfi, you haven't lived. It's a solid chunk of thickened milk, topped with saffron, cardamom and nuts, which is eaten with Falooda (rice noodles). When the mixture of the noodle, nuts and frozen milk explodes in your mouth, it's really something else. Roshan di kulfi on Ajmal Khan Road in Karol Bagh is an excellent place for beginners.

## **Excellent Confectioneries**

For those who prefer to stick to their cakes, pies and minces, Delhi has a host of excellent confectioneries. Wenger's in Connaught Place (revered for its chocolate cake), Sugar & Spice and Nirula's with branches in different localities are among the best going.

## **Pan - Indian Mouth freshner**

The Indian meal is usually rounded off with pan, which is folded betel leaf with a filling of areca nuts, lime and extras like cardamom, clove, nutmeg and grated coconut. The Pan is said to have strong digestive properties. Stories of other more erotic effects are however told by traditional panwallahs who have been in the business for generations. For a price, they might still mix together various spices to weave the same magic that it was supposed to have created in the days of the Kamasutra where it is recommended as an aphrodisiac.

## **Relishing Invitations**

The people of Delhi are generous. Chances are you will be invited to more lunches and dinners than you know what to do with. Delhites like to stuff you, so if you are on a diet put it on temporary hold.. After all, the one thing you can count on in the Delhi lunch-dinner scene is great food. and what the hell, there's always pan.

## **The Dhabas - Traditional Open Air restaurant**

A small boy in vest and shorts comes and slaps water on to the rickety table. You already know the menu of the day, but ask anyway – for the sheer pleasure of listening to it, plus there's lots of time to kill. This is Delhi for god's sake; time not spent in decades is not worth measuring. The boy rattles off without pausing for breath: muttarpulaoshahipaneerzindadaal...'

Ask any Delhite about eating out and with a wistful gleam in his eye he'll tell you that there's nothing quite like the dhaba. These roadside food joints are very much a fixture on the Delhi restaurant scene. Originally dhabas

were located on major highways, where they were supposed to cater to truck drivers on long distance travels. But frankly, almost everybody haunts them for good, cheap food. For example the Express dhaba near the Indian Express building on Bhadurshah Zafar Marg (India's Fleet Street) is a popular hangout with media persons, including big names like Aroon Purie and theatre actors.

People from 'fine' families still shudder at the thought of actually going and eating in a dhaba, but no one has any qualms about ordering take-out meals from there. The reason for their popularity is simple: these modest 'restaurants' turn out surprisingly good Punjabi food and the advantage is that it is fresh and cheap. With time, the dhabas have gone hip and now also include 'buttertoast', sandwiches, fries, Chinese food and much more, though of course they are still best at Punjabi cuisine. So if you can overlook the rather shabby surroundings, the dhaba is a very much a good-deal food outlet in Delhi.