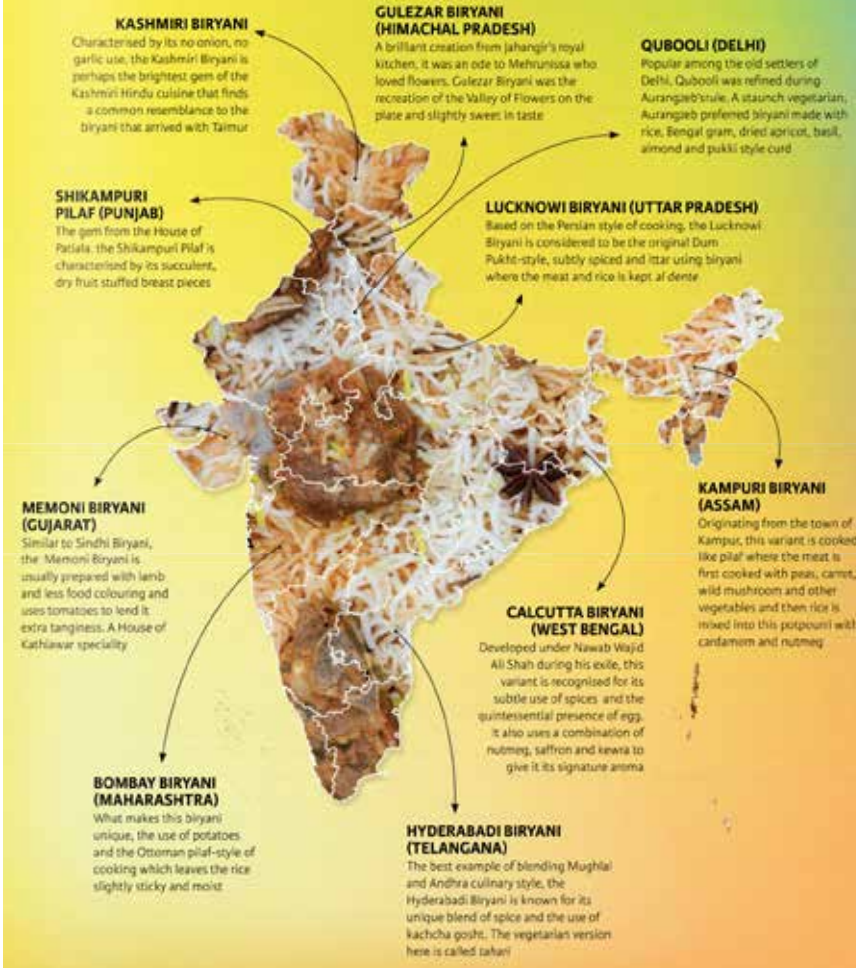


FLAVOURS OF BIRYANI

Biryani could easily fit the description of a national dish, given that every state has its own variant with a history to go with



a great culinary equalizer. The rich, the famous, the royal and the commoners love it yet it is not served to guests." Little did Manrique know a 100 years later, it would remain a royal dish that will be loved by all and served to all!

Text: Madhulika Dash
Source: India Perspectives

Cultural Calendar - December 2015

6 & 7
Sunday Monday

8
Tuesday
9.00am - 5.00 pm

Sitar & Tabla Workshop

by eminent artistes from India
Pandit Anindo Chatterjee – Tabla
and Shri Purbayan Chatterjee – Sitar

Organized by the Amaradeva Foundation
In collaboration with – Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo
Venue: ICC Auditorium

(Admission by prior registration.
Please call on mob # 075 6239352)

Kathak

Ms. Hansa Himawanthi, Master of Performing Art in Kathak
Dance – Bhatkande Music University
Lucknow India
Venue: ICC Auditorium

11
Friday
6.00 pm

14
Monday
6.00 pm

Carnatic Vocal Music Recital

Ms. Chrishanthi Rajiv Clement, Bachelor of Arts in Indian Music,
University of Madras
Venue: ICC Auditorium

Friday matinee- Paa

Directed by R. Balki
Starring: Amitabh Bachchan, Abhishek Bachchan, Vidya Balan
& Paresh Rawal
Venue: ICC Auditorium

18
Friday
3.00 pm

Programmes subject to change

Admission to all programmes are on first come first served basis, except 6th, 7th & 8th events

All are cordially invited

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Indian Council for Cultural Relations
संस्कृत विभाग, नया दिल्ली

Sanskarika

Newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo December 2015



P.C. Aritst - Gayatri Manchanda

The great biryani story

The legendary biryani is more than a simple marriage of rice, meat and an exciting mélange of spices.

Nothing teleports one to the food memory lane like the biryani! A mere mention of this royal dish and you instantly feel the taste of the spice laced aromatic rice played well with the bite of a slow-cooked succulent piece of meat with the smokiness of a clove breaking the symphony. Such is the legacy of this Mughal gift that today India has nearly 26 different varieties strewn across the length and breadth, of India, each with its unique identity, flavours and stories.

Perhaps India's finest culinary export 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 culinary where one story ends and another begins. The Calcutta Biryani for instance. Developed in the kitchen of Wajid Ali Shah during his exile, the Calcutta Biryani was developed from the saffron fragrant yakhni served in the Mystic Feast. It is said that during the exile period, Shah's meat allowance was hugely reduced so much so that serving a good portion of biryani, which back in time was a ratio of three meat pieces per spoon, was getting increasingly difficult. To make it look more like filling, the head cook added a boiled egg to the dish and spices to give it a meat-like taste. Wajid Ali loved the addition and thus was born the first biryani. Of course, the egg was coated with a layer of chicken and fried well.

Another incident of how culture influenced biryani is the Kathal Biryani of the Mathur Kayasthas, the pre- Mughal residents of Old Delhi. History has it that the first tahari, 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. The favourite of Bhopal's Begum Qudisa, the mildly-flavoured Gosht Biryani is said to be inspired by the Moradabadi Biryani that used yakhni (meat broth) to flavor rice. Anthropologists often say the famous Lucknow Dum Biryani was inspired by the making style of Mappilla Biryani where the meat and rice were cooked separately 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 discovered the now famous dum style of cooking which eventually made the Lucknow Biryani famous.

While most believe the Mughals have to be thanked for this innovation, biryani, it so seems, first landed on our shores with the Arabs in Kerala years before the Mughals made India their home. Biryani first finds mention in the 9AD as a fragrant rice dish called Oon Soru in Tamil literature and closely matched the description of Mumtaz Mahal's creation in later 1600 perfectly. Biryani, which comes from the Persian word birian meaning "fried before cooking" was traditionally cooked by tossing the rice in ghee till it attained a bite, before boiling it to al dente and then layering it with separately cooked/fried meat and giving it a finish with rose and saffron. This was also how Oon Soru



was made albeit the rice grains were pearl-shaped with addition of spices like turmeric, coriander, pepper and bay leaf were added. Interestingly, 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, Folklore 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 famous travel historian Al-Biruni, in his travelogue, mentions biryani-alikes existing in India made and being relished by many kings before the Mughals popularized the dish here by making it a military essential.

So could one infer from that the Mopla Kozhi Biryani or Thalassery Biryani is the oldest member of the biryani ledger? Anthropologists believe that could have been the case, given the way Mappila Biryani is cooked – is by the use of dum an art that existed before the Mughals popularized it and short-grained rice called jeerakashala that gives the dish its aroma. However, food historians bracket the birth of biryani between mid – 1500 to mid – 1600.

There are a few who believe it was the pilaf that morphed into biryani and the name as empress Noor Jahan's diary suggests was given to distinguish the vegetarian fare from the non-vegetarian. During that period, biryani was often dressed with fried onions and mint while pilaf came generously garnished with rose or pomegranate. The use of ittar (perfume) was introduced by the queen to mask the meaty aroma so the Hindu nobles could eat along with the king.

The Hyderabad Biryani was created after Aurangzeb appointed Niza-ul-Mulk as the new ruler of Hyderabad. It was Kacchi Biryani perfected and it led to the creations of almost 50 different recipes of biryani that could be made with fish, shrimp, quail and deer meat. Or the Kalyani Biryani, a legacy from the Kalyani Nawabs of Bidar (Karnataka), popularized the use of cubed beef and tomatoes-dhaniya flavor in

biryani. Peshawari Biryani, on the other hand, showcased the use of red and white beans, Kabul chana, black gram and green peas with cashew nuts, almonds, rose water and saffron to add a rich density of flavor.

Though the art of lending biryani a royal lineage was courtesy of the nawabs, some of the best innovations of this Arabic dish comes from the south, be it Ambur Biryani which is prepared 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 flavor 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 with rock salt.

No wonder that Portuguese priest Fra Sebastian Manrique, while visiting the royal courts of India, noted "Biryani is

