



Culinary Institute
of America

Indian Cuisine



Learning Objectives

- Describe the characteristics of northern, southern, eastern, and western regional Indian cuisine.
- Identify the most common Indian spices. Describe the Indian flavor palette. Understand the role of aromatics in Indian cuisine.
- Understand and practice the most common Indian cooking methods.
- Define the characteristics and key ingredients of authentic Indian curry.
- Become familiar with basic menu items characteristic of Indian cuisine.
- Identify the components of a simple family-style Indian meal.
- Prepare a variety of Indian dishes following standardized recipes.

Geography

- Population 1.42 billion
 - 28 States
 - 4 Climates
 - 300 Languages
 - 8 Major Religions
- = 1 Very Diverse Table**



Indian Cuisine



- There is no single “Indian cuisine”
- Many local flavors
- Cuisines divided into four regions: North, South, East, West
- Regional cuisine dependent on local spices
- Strong religious influence

Culinary Regions of India

North

- Central Asian Influence
- Dairy
- Tandoor breads
- Creamy curries
- Meat
- Garam masala
- Amchoor

West

- Wheat Breads
- Legumes
- Fiery hot curries
- Coconut milk



East

- Rice
- Seafood
- White wheat flour

South

- Portuguese influence
- Tropical appearance
- Oil not ghee
- Steamed food
- Rice
- Lentils
- Stews

Indian Spices

- Known for rich, vibrant flavor
- Wide variety
- Influenced by diverse geography, cultural heritage
- Used whole, chopped, ground, roasted, sautéed, fried
- Toasted dry for a masala
- Fried to infuse in oil for a curry (*tadka*)

Spice Tips

- Purchase whole spices when possible
- Store in airtight containers
- Toast whole, cool, then grind
- Designate special grinders for spices only
- Grind and blend masalas to order daily

Spices



Ajowan



Amchur



Asafoetida



Cardamom



Cinnamon



Clove



Coriander Seed



Cumin Seed

Spices



Fennel Seed



Fenugreek



Mace



Mustard Seed



Nutmeg



Saffron



Tamarind



Turmeric

Flavor Palette

- **Sweet:** often derived from natural ingredients like jaggery, palm sugars, coconut, honey, fruit
- **Salty:** balances bitter and sour flavors and enhances sweet and savory ones
- **Sour and Acidic:** tamarind, lemon/ lime juice, coconut palm vinegar, yogurt
- **Spicy:** chiles, red pepper flakes, cayenne, paprika, pepper, and garam masala add heat and intensity
- **Savory:** onions, garlic, cumin, coriander, and turmeric add rich and complex flavors
- **Bitter:** fenugreek, mustard greens, and turmeric add a unique dimension



Other Indian Flavors



- Kokum (sour fruit)
- Unsweetened coconut and oil
- Mustard seed and oil
- Curry Leaves
- Masalas (spice blends)
- Dried fruit powders
- Raita, cooling herbs
- Dal (lentils and peas)
- Nuts (peanuts, cashews)
- Interesting combinations (chutneys, jal jeera)

Aromatics

- Contribute to the diverse flavors and enticing aromas that define Indian cuisine
- Add depth, flavor complexity
- Used fresh, dried, powdered



Pungent:

- Ginger
- Onion
- Garlic
- Asafoetida
- Mustard seeds/ oils

Sweet:

- Cardamom
- Rose
- Fenugreek
- Anardana
- Cinnamon
- Fennel seed
- Saffron

Masalas

- Spice mixture is called a masala
- Combination of dried spices, herbs
- Selected to complement each other
- Made dry or mixed with wet ingredients to make a paste.
- Can also be roasted and then ground
- Often associated with certain dishes
- Combinations vary by region
- Indian cooks often improvise their own masalas

"Masala is soul of Indian cuisine. A well-balanced Masala is the reason behind the unique flavors found in Indian cooking."



Ghee



- ("GEE") is Hindi for "fat"
- Widely used in Indian cuisine
- Tastes like butter, slightly roasted, nutty background note
- Performs better than butter in high-heat cooking (smoke point of 450°F vs. 350°F)
- Results from separating milk solids and butterfat in butter while cooking out the water
- Simmered longer than clarified butter, caramelizing the milk solids before straining the butterfat
- Longer shelf life than butter

Spice Cooking Techniques



**Spice + Heat =
Great Food!**

- **Toasting:** Spices cooked gently over medium-low heat until they give off a “whiff” of fragrance
- **Popping:** Whole spices (mustard, fennel, poppy, sesame, cumin seeds) will “pop” after heat is applied
- **Tempering (*Tadka*):** whole or ground spices heated in hot oil or ghee

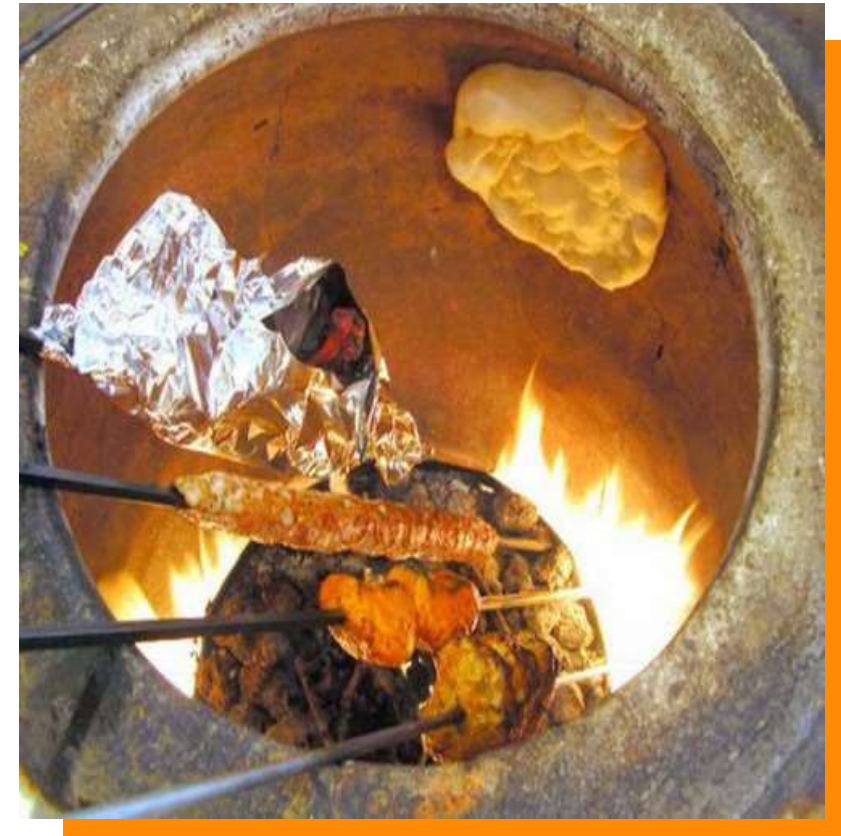
Tempering (*Tadka*)

- Drying spices “freezes” flavor molecules in place, weakens aroma, taste
- Tempering draws out and amplifies flavor and texture
- Whole/ ground spices, herbs heated in hot oil or ghee
- Hot fat extracts + retains essence, aroma, flavor
- Carries essence with it when infused oil is added to a dish
- Done at start or end of the cooking process



Cooking Method: Tandoor Oven

- Large urn-shaped, clay oven
- Heat (can reach 500°F) only escapes through the top and is reflected, intensified by the ceramic sides
- Bake flatbreads: rolled and slapped onto the clay ovens, sticking to the sides
- Roast meats: marinated with a masala/ yogurt mixture, set on skewers
- Infuses the food with smoky flavors



Cooking Method: Bhuna



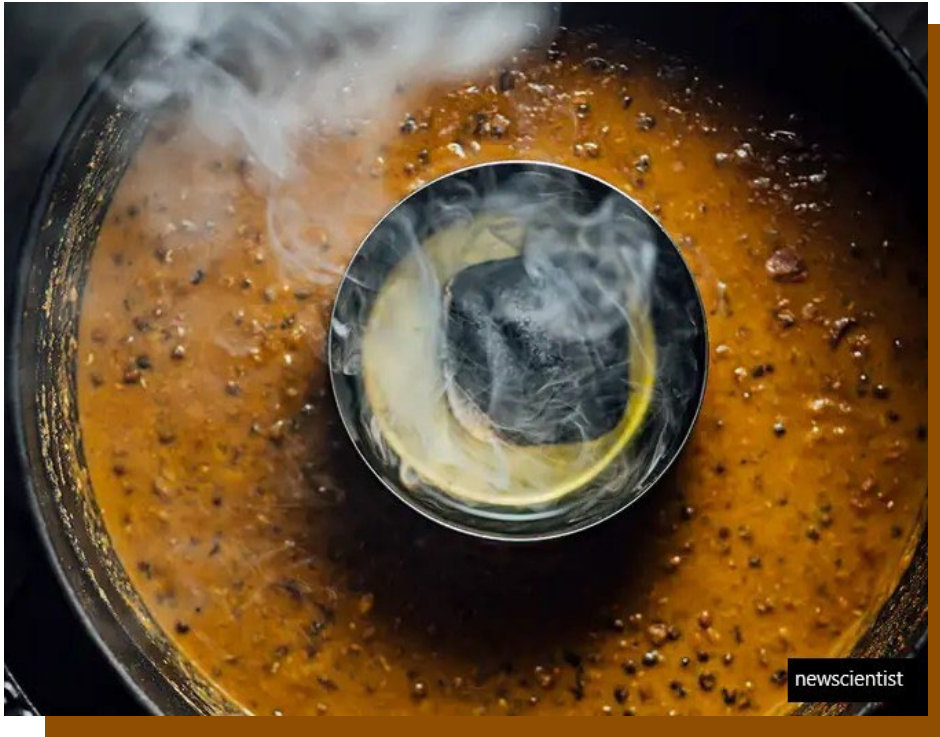
- Sautéing and stir-frying ingredients at low heat until they lose moisture, caramelize
- Causes fat to separate from solids, float to surface
- Spices, aromatics added, cooked to release flavors into the fat
- Stirred constantly so it doesn't burn
- Used to cook base ingredients (onions, tomatoes, ginger, garlic) in oil or ghee with spices

Cooking Method: Dum

- Slow cooking in a sealed, heavy-bottomed vessel
- Food cooked in its own juices by the steam trapped inside
- Unlike steaming, no water added
- Infuses flavor from spices/ herbs
- Makes meat unbelievably tender
- Popular dish: Dum biryani



Cooking Method: Dhungar



- Live coal added to a container of food, often with a lid. Hot oil/ ghee poured over the coal, creating smoke
- Heat from the coal not enough for cooking
- Interaction between fat + coal infuses food with smoky, buttery aroma
- Time is generally a minute or two, depending on how smoky a flavor is desired
- Used as a finishing touch for dals, curries, kebabs



Cooking Method: Bhapa

- Pot-in-pot steam cooking technique
- Two vessels: one with boiled water, one with a perforated bottom for the food
- The perforated vessel is placed in the pot with the water and covered to trap the steam for cooking
- Food sometimes wrapped in banana/turmeric leaves or foil
- Used for steamed rice, idli, Shorshe Bhapa ilish, and dhokla



Cooking Method: Balchao

- Fish, prawns, pork, or vegetables pickled in vinegar and spices
- Food is fermented, then later reduced to a dry preparation
- Served with rice or bread
- Influenced by Portuguese
- Common in coastal areas
- Popular example: prawn balchao



Cooking Method: Talna



- Process of deep-frying
- Use 1-2 inches of fresh oil/ ghee- just enough to immerse the food
- Fresh oil or ghee is used each time (not saved)
- Results in a crispy outer layer and soft, well-cooked inside
- Used for vegetables, meat, samosas, fritters, flatbreads

Curry

- Spicy, colorful, aromatic, sauce-based dishes
- Does not refer to a single dish or flavor
- Usually water-based; occasional use of dairy, coconut milk
- Content/ preparation vary by region
- Local versions found in the Caribbean, Thailand, South Africa, Japan, UK



"Indian Curry to me is a sauce that begins with the trifecta of onions, ginger and garlic. Add spices, tomatoes, protein or vegetable, some liquid, and you have a curry to be enjoyed over a bowl of hot rice, or with roti to dip."

Types of Curry

- **“Warm” Curry:** Spices like black cardamom, cinnamon, bay leaves, mace
- **“Refreshing” Curry:** Coconut milk, lemon grass, lime leaves, tamarind
- **“Hot” Curry:** Heat from chiles (bird’s eye, red or Kashmiri)



Chutney



- East Indian for "strongly spiced"
- Condiment of chopped fruits, vinegar, spices, sugar cooked into a spread
- Not defined by main ingredient or texture
- Has a fruit base, but non-sweet, vegetables can also be used
- Smooth and fluid or chunky and firm
- Balance of sweet, sour, spicy flavors

Raita

- From Sanskrit “black mustard seed” and “sharp or pungent”
- Yogurt-bound side dish
- Cooling counterpoint to spicy food
- Contains raw/ cooked vegetables or sometimes fruit
- Seasoned with coriander, roasted cumin seeds, mint, cayenne, chaat masala, other herbs/ spices



Dal

- From Sanskrit "to split"
- Dried, polished, and split pulses (lentils, peas, and beans)
- Do not require soaking
- Prepared as a soup with onions, tomatoes, spices
- Served with flatbreads or rice
- 3 Forms:
 - Unhulled (*sabut*)
 - Split with hull (*chilka*)
 - Split, hulled (*dhuli*)



Basmati Rice

- Long-grain rice
- Light, nutty flavor, floral aroma
- Most popular type of rice in India
- White, brown varieties (brown higher in fiber/ nutrients)
- Steamed or cooked using the pilaf method (sautéing in oil with aromatics before adding hot liquid and baking in oven)
- Ideal with curries, as the fluffy grains absorb sauce well



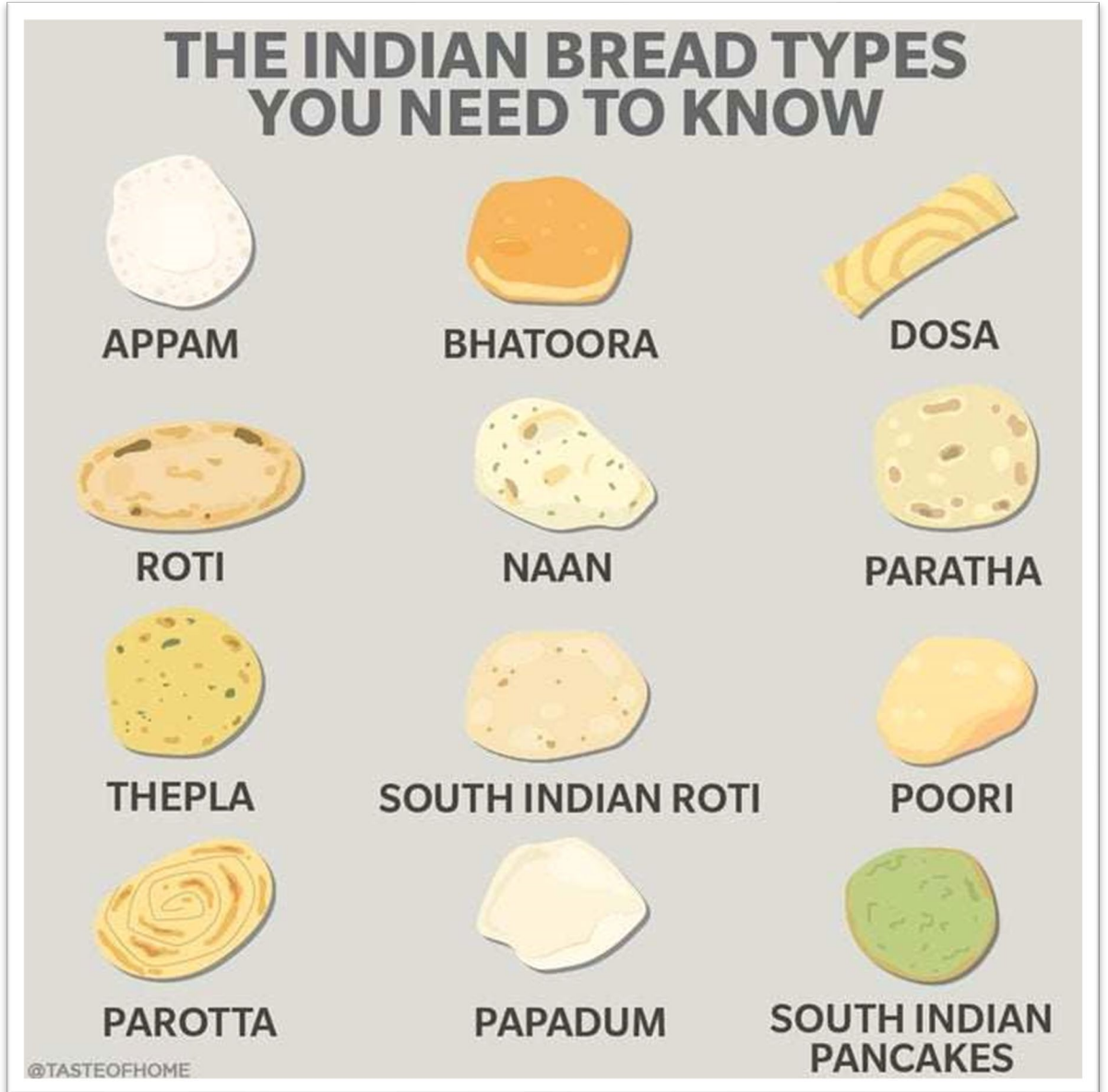
Naan

- From Persian “bread”
- Leavened, oven-baked or fried Indian flatbread
- Originally from Persia/ Iran
- Usually made with milk or yogurt, butter, sometimes eggs, making it soft
- Traditionally cooked in a tandoor or earthen oven
- Perfect for mopping up the gravy in Indian curries or other dishes



Flatbreads

- Many regional variations
- Usually unleavened
- Northern India: made primarily from milled wheat flour
- Southern India: made from ground and fermented rice and dal
- Served at every meal
- Used as utensils



Creating an Indian Meal

Family-Style Service

- ☐ Chutney
- ☐ Pickles
- ☐ Sauces: hot, cold, sweet, sour
- ☐ Rice
- ☐ Dal
- ☐ Main dish
- ☐ Flatbreads: wheat or rice/ dal batter
- ☐ Tea, water or lassi

- Flavor profile: all about the spices and how they are cooked/ balanced
- Blend spices and cook
- Add vegetables/ meat
- Cook moist or marinate and cook dry



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Any Questions?