

Dawat Yan Banquet

Dawat-e-Biryani

Audio+Video, Recipe, Storytelling, Archives

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Transcription

What is the history of Biryani?

The exact origin of the dish is unknown. The common consensus is that modern day biryani was developed in the royal kitchens of the Mughal Empire and is a mix of Indian spicy rice dishes with Iranian pulao dishes, brought by the Mughals from Persia. When Babur came to India from Ferghana in present-day Uzbekistan, he brought along the hearty pilafs and kebabs of his homeland. By the time his great-great grandson Shah Jahan sat on the Peacock Throne, the bland dishes his ancestors ate had acquired heat from the chillies that Portuguese traders had introduced to India, and they were vibrant with the brightness of tomatoes, and the punch of Indian spices.

It is speculated that Biryani of south Indian origin derived from pilau varieties were brought to the Indian subcontinent by Arab traders and pulao was the army dish in medieval India. The meat used for the biryani could be any variation of your favourite meats, something you prefer to consume, whatever you feel comfortable with or simply whatever is available. As an idea you could make it with mutton, chicken fish, vegetarian or shrimp, all equally delicious combinations of this wonderful dish that spans the entire subcontinent. No region makes their Biryani in the same way, some versions add more spice, while others add more sweetness, and some even bitterness that suits the local flavour palate. One thing they all share is their ability to bring people together for a feast. The biggest recipe recorded was a Mughal kitchen recipe for a whopping 800 people. It included 4kg of garlic and ginger, and hundreds of kilos of meat.

Is all Biryani the same? How does Biryani shift from province to province, country to country? Can you speak to the diversity of Biryani, and why you chose the version you are making for us today?

The Sindhi Biryani which I'll be making in this recipe is a special meat and rice Biryani dish originating from the Sindh province of Pakistan, and reigns supreme in its popularity among the entire nation, being one of the most consumed dishes of Pakistani cuisine. Sindhi Biryani is even served on almost all the flights of Pakistan International Airlines, PIA as well. And what makes Sindhi Biryani different from other Biryani is the addition of potatoes and prunes. These additions create a mouthwatering experience for the connoisseur and many in the city of Karachi have their ideas on who makes the best one.

What is your link with Biryani? Why do you make it, and what do you enjoy about it?

I have visited the city of Karachi, Pakistan on multiple occasions, one of them being my marriage, and tasted the best of the best Biryani, and I simply had to learn how to make my own upon my return to Canada. It is now a staple in my monthly diet, and something I truly look forward to indulging in. I enjoy visualizing the entire process before starting out, as it has many layers and steps. From the soaking of the rice, to the meat masala, to the potatoes roasting, the doneness of the rice, the layering of the rice and meat, the dum process in the end, every step is crucial to a good Biryani. It is this methodology that keeps me focused on the dish, giving it my all and not taking any shortcuts in the process. Falling in love with the process was also coinciding with me falling in love with the culture and customs of the region.

Can you speak to the layers that go into making the Biryani?

A good Sindhi Biryani is two layers of rice, and one layer of meat, with a layer of lemons and herbs on top, topped with lemon juice, and garam masala. Once done, the layers are supposed to be lightly tossed from bottom to top with a wooden spatula, while still in the cooking dish. It is all about the layers, which make a wonderfully looking meal when mixed on a serving plate.

How long does it take to make a Biryani? Are there shortcuts to make it more accessible for the modern human with busy schedules?

Biryani generally takes me about an hour and a half, dum included. I do not use any shortcuts, and make the biryani masala from scratch in a mortar and pestle method. I use an organic long-grain basmati rice cooked in a pressure cooker on HIGH for 2.5 minutes and quick release. This gives the rice just the right consistency for Biryani, and gets it prepared for the dum process, where all the flavours come together. People who are busy in their lives can purchase store-bought masalas, which save some time in the spice department, and make the process very auto-pilot, losing out on taste and health aspects of the dish. Having been taught this recipe by local Biryani elders, I will be sticking to the no shortcut rule here.

Why is Biryani a good addition for the Dawat Yan Banquet?

One thing that qualifies Biryani for the Dawat Yan Banquet is the dishes ability to bring people together, in feast, and in community, making the basis for the Dawat Yan Banquet. The food is inclusive, historical, and has connections to the Old Silk Road. Regional variations have all the common elements, the cause and effects of historical trading, and colonialism in the South Asian subcontinent. Biryani brings a unique perspective to Dawat Yan, making the viewing question borders, race, and culture through an unbiased lens of a foreign regional expert.

What is the best way to consume Biryani? Do we need any sides or condiments?

Hands must be used when traditionally eating Biryani, as licking the fingers after is very customary and acceptable. Sides and condiments are raita, a yogurt/cucumber dip that goes on

top of your Biryani when on your plate. It helps cool you, and prepares your senses for the savoury, spicy taste of the Biryani. Some even take little packets of garam masala and sprinkle it on for even more depth of flavour.

How did you find this recipe?

This recipe was found on one of my Karachi colony visits during my 2019 stay there. I ventured off wanting to experience Karachi outside of the Defense area where I was staying at the time. I wanted to experience what life is like among the people. During my expedition I got lost in a shopping center, and wound up in front of a famous local Biryani place. I saw large cauldrons of Biryani in the beginning stages of cooking, and decided to have a look. The gentlemen preparing the Biryani politely smiled at me and gestured to me to come closer. "Salaam" one of them yelled at me. "Wasalaam" I shouted back. "Where from?" He excitedly shouted in English, gesturing me to come closer. I told him I was lost, upon which time a cup of karak chai appeared in my hands seemingly out of nowhere. "Sit and watch," the uncle said to me. I watched as before my very eyes, probably the biggest cauldron of Biryani was being made. They were making a very large order for the local orphanage, and they let me watch the entire process. The smells, aromas, and the kindness of the human spirit touched me, and I connected with the dish in a very pragmatic way. The levels and dimensions of the dish transcend race, culture, and even though our communities are miles apart, we share the same human outlook.