

TEXT **SRIDEVI PADMANABHAN**
 PHOTOGRAPHS **SANJAY RAMACHANDRAN**

Flavours FROM THE Past

Anglo-Indian culinary tradition, one of the oldest fusion cuisines, was a hybrid of the colonial culinary practices, which merged with local cuisine.

LEGEND HAS IT THAT IN 1690, Job Charnock, an agent of the British East India Company stepped off his ship on the banks of the river Hooghly and ate khichuri, a one-pot meal of rice and lentils cooked together. Purported to be the inspiration for the Anglo-Indian dish, kedgerie, this incident was one amongst many that slowly gave rise to a unique Anglo-Indian cuisine.

CULINARY TRADITIONS

The term Anglo-Indian refers to people of not just mixed Indian and British ancestry, but also includes descendants of Indo-Portuguese, Indo-Dutch and Indo-French origin. Borrowing heavily from Britain's culinary traditions, the distinctive cuisine of the community grew out of culinary inventions by the *khansamas* (Indian cooks). Under the guidance of their memsahib, they modified European dishes with local spices, cooking techniques and ingredients to satisfy the tastes of their British masters.

Everything from tangy soups tempered with cumin and pepper to roasts cooked in fragrant whole spices and the added touch of turmeric in rissoles and croquettes—Anglo-Indian dishes have their unmistakable stamp. Describing the cuisine's fluid flavour profiles, Executive Chef Sandip Narang, Taj West End, Bengaluru says, "The spices in each region influence the flavours of the cuisine. In South India, Anglo-Indian dishes tend to use pepper, cinnamon and cardamom, while souring agents such as vinegar and kokum are popular in the Goa-Mumbai region. In the East, the gravies use fewer spices." In her book *The Great Curries of India*, Camellia Panjabi describes the antecedents of the dish. As the British trading station grew in Madras (now Chennai), British women moved in, households were set up and local cooks and servants were hired. One of

Right: The delicious fish kadagree at The Claridges, Delhi





Above: The mutton ball curry with yellow rice at Vivanta by Taj, Gurgaon is scrumptious.

Below: The crunchy pantaras at The Claridges.



Every dish that is a part of the Anglo-Indian cuisine has a wonderful history and compelling tales associated with it.

the local recipes that was adapted for British tastes was the Tamil dish milagu thanni (pepper water), which became the popular mulligatawny soup, served in restaurants around the world today. A great accompaniment to the soup is liver pepper fry served alongside saffron-flavoured coconut rice. Another mainstay of Anglo-Indian households was the soup made of either goat or lamb trotters.

Every dish that is a part of this cuisine has a wonderful history and compelling tales associated with it. Executive Chef Arzooman Irani talks of his tryst with Anglo-Indian cuisine, "It began with a 107-year-old recipe book that was given to me by Harry Blake's granddaughter. The collection of recipes included those of various dishes and his favourite Indian sweets. Interestingly, Harry's recipe for fish curry had a strong flavour of mustard which is rare in Anglo-Indian cuisine." Speaking of dishes with a history, a decadent dish of lamb marinated in whole spices and slow cooked in a tightly sealed vessel for hours on end, the lamb dumpoke is a must-try. Dumpoke is nothing but the anglicised version of dum pukht, a cooking technique that was brought to India by the Mughals. The country captain chicken is another favourite. In the past, homegrown country chicken was used in the preparation of this curry and the process would take over two hours over a wood-fired oven. The slow-cooking process and the chicken used lend this curry its signature heavenly flavour. It is said that the dish got its name from a grandmother who cooked it for her grandson, who was a captain in the army. Another account claims that the dish was a favourite with captains of British trade ships and so the name.

Understandably, the setting up of the railways in the Indian subcontinent by the British, after the 1857 mutiny influenced the development of Anglo-Indian cuisine in a big way. In *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*, Lizzie Collingham says that the food served at a lonely train station, in the dining carriage and the dak bungalow (rest houses) were similar. That's how dishes such as the railway mutton curry and the dak bungalow chicken came into being. Since these stations and dak bungalows were typically located along the trunk roads that didn't have access to ready provisions, the spices and ingredients were used according to what was available.



Clockwise from top left: Anglo-Indian fish curry at Taj West End, Bengaluru; **Garlic Dal** at Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba; Truffle pudding at The Claridges; Tomato pulao and veg stew at Vivanta by Taj.



A big part of the British club culture was high tea, in which tea along with snacks and baked pastries were served on delicate china.

capsicum, onion, tomato, carrot, peas and cauliflower. Fresh and crunchy with the zing of hot chillies it is the perfect accompaniment to the some of the milder dishes. Believed to have originated during colonial times as a method of heating up leftovers, jalfrezi gets its name from *jhal* meaning ‘spicy hot’ in Bengali. Vishal Atreya, Executive Chef at The Imperial, New Delhi says, “Anglo-Indian cuisine has an old-world charm to it. It has survived the tides of time and has created a definitive place for itself in the Indian palate.” A big part of the British club culture was high tea, in which tea along with snacks and baked pastries was served in delicate china. Pantaras or pan rolls is one such snack which is still served in clubs around the country. Crunchy exterior with a mincemeat filling, it is the perfect companion to a cup of Darjeeling tea. Equally enticing snack options include the kabiraji cutlet (egg-covered chicken cutlet), fowl cutlet, rissoles and fish croquettes.

Can a meal ever be complete without dessert? Anglo-Indian desserts tend to be an invitation to sin. Besides Christmas favourites like plum cake, kulkuls, rose cookies, and marzipan, there is the humble yet delicious bread pudding. Originally a way to use up stale bread, the bread pudding has slowly transformed over the years into its rich and tempting present-day avatar. Anglo-Indian cuisine is about more than just food. It speaks of India’s colonial legacy and is a testament to the adaptive ways of human beings who allow themselves to be changed and also to change those whom they

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

There’re plenty of options for vegetarians in Anglo-Indian cuisine. Foogath, a dry accompaniment made with beans, carrot and cabbage or other vegetables is one such dish. Served after it is tempered with mustard and grated coconut, it is a sure-fire hit for your tastebuds. Another scrumptious dish with an interesting history is vegetable jalfrezi, a hot and spicy medley of stir-fried vegetables: potato,



Left: Anglo-Indian fish balls at Taj West End.



Right: Mulligatawny soup at The Claridges.

come into contact with. Unpretentious yet mouth-watering, Anglo-Indian cuisine is clearly here to stay. "Initially, there was a fear of Anglo-Indian cuisine disappearing because significant numbers from the community moved abroad and the younger generation didn't seem interested in exploring the cuisine of their forefathers. However, Indian-origin chefs in the West have been connecting with the cuisine and home chefs have been popularising it in a big way," says Executive Chef, Sahil Sabhlok, The Claridges, Delhi. ■



ENGINEERING
 MEDICINE
 DENTAL
 B. SCHOOL
 PHARMACY
 BIO-TECHNOLOGY
 HOTEL MANAGEMENT
 LAW
 AGRICULTURE
 NURSING

competition success *review* Presented
 Top Institutes of India Award-2015
 Excellence in Education Award-2015

Ranked 13th by

THEWEEK

among top Private/Deemed Universities in India



A Bright Future Begins Here...



SIKSHA 'O' ANUSANDHAN UNIVERSITY

(A Deemed University declared U/S 3 of UGC Act, 1956)

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, Contact : 0674-2350635 / 2350791

www.soauniversity.ac.in