

# CEIA

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## *The Culinary Independence of India*

Adding the desi touch to global cuisine

### **CULINARY MAESTRO**

Chef Sarfaraz Ahmed

Creating gastronomic magic at Trèsind, Mumbai

### **RAJASTHAN ON YOUR PLATE**

Looking beyond the typical Dal Baati Churma



# Rajasthan on your plate

Looking beyond the  
typical Dal Baati Churma

*By Bindu Gopal Rao*

Rajasthan being the largest state in the country has a varied and diverse cuisine. From the pure vegetarian food that comes from Marwar to the meat-based dishes of the Rajput community, the state has something for everyone.

### ***Nuanced Cuisine***

On a recent visit to **Welcomheritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa** in Bera, Jawai in Rajasthan, I was served a traditional Rajasthani meal and to my surprise it did not have the quintessential dal baati churma, something I had conditioned my mind to associate with Rajasthani food. One of the interesting dishes I had was called Kawa. The star of the dish was broken pieces of chapati, or roti tossed in a melange of vegetables. **Bhanwar Singh Rathore**, Executive Chef, Welcomheritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa explained to me that in normal households in Western Rajasthan, women dry the rotis left over from the previous day or from functions and use them in different ways. He explains, “there is a Rajasthani Dhokla, which could not get much recognition that is served and eaten in different ways at any time of the day. At the beginning of the day, it is eaten with curd as breakfast, in the afternoon it is eaten with Dhokla Kadi and in the evening, it is eaten in the form of sweet with ghee and molasses sugar. It is made using coarsely ground millet, barley, wheat, and maize flours, crushed whole red chilli, crushed whole coriander, salt, crushed cumin and papad salt which is specially used here. Mixing all these ingredients, the flour is kneaded with lukewarm water. This is shaped into what resembles a donut and is cooked in a special method. The twigs of the millet plant are deposited in a handi, under which water is filled as much as that of the Dhokla placed on the twigs. There is no direct contact and then the lid of the handi is sealed by applying flour dough and then after cooking it is placed on the coals made of wood so that those coals are also put to good use. That is why everything is used here in such a way that nothing gets wasted and



Photo: Welcomheritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa



dhoklas are prepared by steaming on a low flame of coal.”

### **Exploring the Unknown**

Some of the lesser-known dishes include Safed Maas, Junglee Maas, Soyeta, Sooley, and Khichda. These are dishes that have a long and storied history but have flown under the radar due to the popularity of Laal Maas. And as for vegetarian dishes, items such as Gatta Curry, Mangodi ki Sabzi and Chakki ka Saag are a must try. Something that most traditional Rajasthani households do is combine sweets with savoury staples. A somewhat lesser-known dessert is Bajra ki Kath that is like Churma but is set and cut like Barfis. “There are a host of unique ingredients that we use extensively such as Gunda, Kachri, Mathania chilli, Nagauri aloo, Chawla fali, Chandellia, Gondh (Edible Gum) and camel milk. Some interesting desserts from Rajasthan are Choongri which is made using whole wheat and jaggery, Mawa Kachodi, Malpua, Balushahi, Gulab Halwa, and Ghewar. The cuisine is very hearty, robust, spicy, and flavourful. There are



Photo Courtesy Taj Hari Mahal, Jodhpur

cuisines of the differently erstwhile royal families that spotlight heirloom recipes. Hunting cuisine is also unique to Rajasthan,” says **Sandeep Singh**, Executive Chef, **Taj Hari Mahal**, Jodhpur. The humble Panchmela Sabzi that originates from the households of Rajasthan has its roots in Hindi / Sanskrit as panch denotes five - this simple yet flavourful dish is a mix of five vegetables tempered with spices smoked in ghee. Other vegetarian options range from Dana Methi Sabzi, Moong Kishmish Bhaji, Panchmela Sabzi, Rabodi ki Sabz, Pithod Curry (made using chickpea flour), Chakki Ki Sabzi (made with wheat flour dumplings), Marwadi dal, Kabuli pulao, Banjara Gosht and Choongri (dessert).

### **Sustainability Cues**

Rajasthan has always been a big promoter of using millets in its cuisine. Due to the arid climate of the state, millets were prioritised way more than the traditional crops as it required less than one fifth of the water required to grow rice. Millets like Jowar, Bajra, and Ragi are staples in Rajasthan. “The

cultivation of millets is highly sustainable as it requires much less water than traditional grain crops such as wheat or rice. Millets can also be cultivated in as little as two months whereas it would require around 7-8 months to harvest a crop of wheat. Along with that, one of the most sustainable methods of cooking comes from times of war when food used to be cooked underground. It is a practice that was followed by soldiers out on the battlefield where they would dig pits in the ground and cook meat in them at night so that no open flame would give away their location. This utilitarian method also came in handy during royal hunting trips as it was very convenient. Food cooked in such a way would be part of what is called Khad Cuisine, which is food cooked in a pit,” says **Parul Kapoor**, Executive Chef, **ITC Hotels**.

### **Food Preservation**

From whole grains to spices, dried vegetables to meats and even cooking techniques, Rajasthani cuisine mirrors the state’s diverse culture, history, and heritage. Something that is prevalent in Rajasthani cuisine is the highly efficient techniques of preserving food. From drying beans such as Ker and Sangri, to drying and powdering red chillies, which

are now famous worldwide, to using Kachri powder (which comes from a cucumber called Cucumis Pubescens that possess traits like resistance to pests and drought) as a tenderiser for meats. Rajasthani cuisine has made excellent use of the ingredients at its disposal and to ensure its longevity in such an arid climate. **Rajeev Sharma**, Director, F&B **Samode Hotels**, says, “earlier as fresh vegetables were not available throughout the year, traditional Rajasthani cuisine includes numerous dishes that are based on dried grains and vegetables that are naturally preserved to retain their nutrients. You will also notice that our cuisine also includes chutneys, the most popular being the garlic chutney which is simple and makes use of locally available ingredients like garlic, turmeric, mint, and coriander.” Owing to the geography and weather conditions of most parts of the state, the cuisine of Rajasthan is such that it can survive arid conditions easily and give warmth when needed. The usage of local ingredients to reduce carbon footprint and sustainability is intrinsically maintained using dry ingredients with long shelf life like chickpea flour, wheat flour and milk products that are cooling for the digestive system. What’s not to love then?



Photo Courtesy Parul Kapoor, Executive Chef, ITC Hotels