



EACH **SPICEJET AIRCRAFT** HAS BEEN NAMED AFTER A PARTICULAR SPICE. IN THIS ISSUE WE TALK ABOUT THE BENEFITS AND USAGE OF **ASAFOETIDA**



Punjabi Kadhi Pakoda with steamed rice

## PACKING A PUNCH

IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE YOUR *DAL*, *SABZI* OR PICKLE SANS THIS POWERFUL PERSIAN IMPORT.

BY: BINDU GOPAL RAO

**IF THERE IS ONE SPICE**, even a pinch of which can dramatically alter the taste of your food, it is asafoetida! An inseparable component of Indian cooking, perhaps the Hindi expression, “*Hing lage na phitkari, rang bhi chowka aeh*”, which roughly translates as “Deriving gain without much pain”, best describes asafoetida or hing, as it is commonly known in India.

A semantic meeting of East and West, the word asafoetida is derived from asa, a sort of Latinised version of aza which is Persian for “sap” and foetida, which is again Latin for

“stinking”. The spice is a dried gum, albeit foul smelling, extracted from the tap root of perennial herb *Ferula*. However it has been hailed as “Food of the Gods” possibly because it imparts an astonishingly agreeable flavour to most foods, when used in sensible quantities.

Two main varieties are available, hing kabuli sufaid (creamy white) and hing lal (red), about which, Chef Sharad Dewan, The Park Hotels, says, “The white version is water-soluble while the red one is oil-soluble. Pure asafoetida is not chosen owing to its physically powerful flavour; it is assorted with starch and a stick of gum and sold as compounded asafoetida. It is also available in powder form.”

Be it red or white, hing has been a constituent of the Indian spice box for long and continues to be utilised both in cooking and as a solution, says a spokesperson from Bodega Cantina-Y-Bar, Kolkata. It finds use mainly in dal- and pickle- tempering, sambar, rasam, cheewra, fish curries, and dishes without onion and garlic. As substitute for onion and garlic, asafoetida is popular with Brahmins and the Jain community as their food is typically devoid of these ingredients. According to Chef Vicky Ratnani, Head Chef, The Korner House, “Hing was found around Iran and Persia and forms part of the Rajasic diet under Yoga. Since it is reminiscent of onion and garlic, it is used in cooking during periods of fasting. Kashmiri hing is the best in our country.”

Kashmiri pundits are known to use asafoetida in dishes such as Haaq Saag, Nadir Gaad and Dum Olav whereas in Uttar Pradesh, the spice is the primary



Parsi Tiffin Box and (right) Dal Ka Shorba



## HING TIL KE CHATPATE ALOO

RECIPE BY SANDEEP KUMAR,  
EXECUTIVE CHEF, ALOFT BENGALURU  
CESSNA BUSINESS PARK

### INGREDIENTS

Potatoes:	322gm
Oil:	10gm
Sesame:	5gm
Turmeric Powder:	5gm
Green chilli:	5gm
Salt:	6gm
Fresh coriander:	10gm
Ginger-garlic paste:	5gm
Onion tomato masala:	80gm

Hing: 1gm

### METHOD

First boil the potatoes with their skins on. Peel the potatoes and split them into halves. Heat mustard oil, add cumin seeds and asafoetida. Add coriander powder, turmeric powder, chilli powder, curry masala, chopped ginger and green chillies. Add potatoes. Add salt, black salt, and lemon juice. Add some sesame and crushed black pepper. Garnish with chopped fresh coriander and serve.

component of a popular dish called hing-jeera aloo. Chef Saurabh Udinia, Chef de Cuisine – Modern Indian, Massive Restaurants Private Limited, informs, “It is added to bhutte ki khees, a much-loved dish in Madhya Pradesh. In Rajasthan, it is used in tempering while in Bengal, it is used extensively in fish preparations. South Indian cuisine utilises asafoetida in almost all vegetarian dishes including sambar, rasam, etc.” Ashvini Kumar, Executive Chef, Four Points by Sheraton, Navi Mumbai, opines, “The spice is widely used in cuisines of Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka that are mainly vegetarian; it is frequently used to tone sweet, sour, spicy and salty components of food.” For Chef Vikas Pant, Radisson Blu Paschim Vihar, asafoetida smells best with ghee and is used as a digestive as well. Indeed, the spice complements most Indian vegetables and whether it’s an elaborate vegetable curry or a simple sauté, a pinch or two of asafoetida added in the beginning goes a long way. Be sure though to store it in airtight containers as its sulphurous odour can affect other foods and spices.

Sometimes, asafoetida is fried along with sautéed onion and garlic, says Chef Lakhbir Singh Chahal, Senior Chef de Cuisine, Shangri-La Hotel, Bengaluru. “Since it is always cooked in fat first, adding the powder to the preparation just before turning the heat off and putting the lid on, or adding water in which a piece of the spice has been dissolved to the preparation before putting the lid yields a full, smooth and satisfying feel which you may not be able to pin down but would miss if it wasn’t there.” Pointing to asafoetida’s use in the





Top: South Indian Thali. Bottom: Hing  
Paneer Ki Subzi

popular Indian snack, cheewra, Swasti Aggarwal, Food Strategist, Foodhall, says, “It is an important ingredient of this mixture of grains, dried fruits and spices. One can use it in minute quantities, adding directly to cooking liquid, frying in oil, or steeping in water.”

While hing is to Indian cooking what say cheese is to Italian cuisine, it is also a necessary component of western preparations like Worcester sauce and is even used to flavour a wide variety of foods and drinks.

The culinary value apart, asafoetida's use in home-grown medication dates back to the 7th century B.C. Known for its antibiotic properties, it continues to have a wide range of applications in the field of medicine. As Dr Arun Aravind, Head – Spa, Niraamaya Retreats, explains, “It is packed with immense health benefits

and helps fight problems related to digestion, the nervous system, respiratory system, heart, blood pressure, skin, etc. Asafoetida powder mixed in buttermilk is an age-old remedy for bloating. A pinch of hing powder in at least one meal of the day prevents digestive ailments, reduces flatulence, and helps in irritable bowels syndrome (IBS). It decreases cholesterol absorption in the gastrointestinal tract which in turn reduces cholesterol levels in blood.”

Ashwani Kumar Singh, Chef de Cuisine, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi, shares similar views. “Hing aids digestion and is known to have natural antimicrobial properties and helps fight flu, cough and cold,” he says.

Looks like asafoetida is that magic wand you wave when you want to make things right - be it your food or your health! ■