



# luxurious feasts

**Avadhi cuisine is considered the subtlest of Indian cuisines. Typical of Uttar Pradesh and its capital, Lucknow, it evokes the glory of Mughal rule and the Nawabi house of Avadh.**

**text & photographs by Aruna Rathod  
photographic location courtesy  
The Nawab Saheb, The Renaissance, Powai, Mumbai**

**m**ost families in Uttar Pradesh eat vegetarian food that revolves around simple, vegetable curries of all kinds, although meat delicacies of the Avadh (Lucknow) style of cooking are world famous. There is a predominance of fried foods, such as the tasty *kachori* (savory filled pastry) and *puri*, which are a must, especially during festivities. Much emphasis is placed on savories and sweet meats. Each city offers a different but equally inviting cuisine. Varanasi is famous for its bazaars full of sweetmeats, especially *jalebis* (crisp-fried batter spirals soaked in syrup), and a myriad variety of *kachoris*. The *pethas* (reduced milk sweets) from

Agra are popular all over the country. *Mathris* (gram flour crackers) and a wide variety of foods are offered to guests, according to the classic *tehzeeb*, or courtesy, that dictates that one must offer all guests such savouries. The ritual of offering *pan* (betel leaf) to a guest on his arrival and at the time of his departure was chronicled by Ibn Batuta in the 12th century, and still remains popular in Lucknow. The betel vine is grown in hot and humid climate but under shade so that direct sunlight does not burn the leaves. Generally, *pan* is used with *kattha* (catechu) and quick lime, which turns red in the mouth. Betelnuts and other items, such as clove, cardamom, peppermint, are

**The Nawabs of Avadh had a tradition of *nazakat* – delicacy, and *nifasat* – refinement, and these traditional qualities applied also to their food**

added for special taste and aroma.

With the fall of the Mughal Empire in the 18th century, the secrets of Avadhi gastronomy were lost to all but a few direct descendants of the 200-year-old Avadhi clan of royal chefs.

History has it that the kebab, one of the main starters of Avadhi food, was the camp fare of central Asian desert tribes. It then underwent numerous variations, depending on where it travelled, from Kabul, Peshawar and Lahore to Lucknow, where royal chefs worked their magic on it.

The word, kebab, is derived from Persian (*aab* means water, and *kam* means less – a dish cooked with minimal liquid). The meat was diced, minced and pounded, then flavoured with herbs and spices. After being moulded into various shapes, the kebabs were grilled, fried or skewered, and baked in a charcoal oven.

While the Hyderabadis like their meat in large chunks and heavily spiced, in the delicate kebabs of Lucknow (Avadh), the meat is ground so fine that a child can eat it. The famous galouti kebab is a special kebab that literally melts in the mouth. It was made for Nawabs who were too lazy to chew. The secret masala is made by the womenfolk of the family – giving it a special flavour. In order not to exclude vegetarians from the delights of the cuisine, Avadhi chefs worked on the *subz ke galouti*.

While the kebab evolved over the years, *dum pukht* cuisine was discovered



**LAGAN KI BOTI**

serves 6

**ingredients**

**for the marinade:**

- 15 g ground ginger and garlic
- 2.5-cm cinnamon
- 3 green cardamom
- 3 black cardamom
- 5 cloves
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp ground red chilli
- salt to taste

**for the meat:**

- 1 kg *dasti* (lamb shoulder), de-boned and cut into 2.5-cm pieces
- 50 ml ghee
- 15 g ground ginger and garlic
- 300 g onion, sliced and fried golden brown
- 30 g fresh coriander, chopped
- 7.5 g green chilli, chopped
- 10 g fresh mint, chopped
- 20 g onion, fried
- 10 g ground cinnamon
- 2 g ground cloves
- 7 g ground green cardamom
- 6 g ground mace
- 20 g ground cumin
- 20 g ground red chilli
- 50 ml yoghurt
- salt to taste

**for the garnish:**

- 20 g ginger, julienned
- 7.5 g green chilli, julienned

**preparation time**

- marination: 4 hr
- cooking: 45 min

**method**

1. Marinate meat and refrigerate for 4 hr.
2. Heat ghee in a *lagan* (flat pan). Add ginger-garlic paste and saute.
3. Add the meat and stir for 5 min.
4. Add the onion and simmer on low heat, until meat is tender.
5. Add chopped coriander, chilli and mint and all powdered spices, and stir over low heat.
6. Add yoghurt and cook till meat is covered in gravy.
7. Adjust seasoning and serve hot, garnished with ginger and green chilli juliennes, accompanied by roti.

**NIHARI**

serves 6

**ingredients**

1 kg mutton on the bone  
 40 ml mustard oil  
 5 g ground cardamom  
 250 g onion, sliced  
 15 g ground garlic  
 10 g ground ginger  
 7 g ground coriander powder  
 5 g ground cumin  
 3 g ground mace  
 2 g grated nutmeg  
 2 g ground cinnamon  
 200 ml yoghurt  
 7 g roasted gram  
 5 g ground black pepper  
 salt to taste

**for the garnish:**

12 sprigs fresh coriander, chopped  
 2.5-cm cube ginger, julienned

**method**

1. Wash mutton and set aside.
2. Heat mustard oil in a pan until it begins to smoke.
3. Add cardamom and sliced onion and saute until brown.
4. Add garlic and ginger.
5. Add mutton and the rest of the ingredients in the same order. Mix well and cook covered for 75–90 min, until the meat is cooked through. Adjust seasonings and garnish with coriander and ginger juliennes.
6. Serve hot with *kulcha* (large, soft puri) or *taftan* (fluffy wheat bread)

**ULTEY TAWA KA PARATHA**

makes 36

**ingredients**

1 kg flour  
 100 g gram flour  
 20 g sugar  
 5 g saffron  
 7 g ground cardamom  
 3 g ground *saunf* (aniseed)  
 200 g ground cashewnut  
 300 ml milk  
 750 g dairy ghee, melted  
 salt to taste

**method**

1. Sieve the flour and gram flour together and make a dip in the centre.
2. Dissolve the sugar, saffron, cardamom, *saunf* and cashewnut in milk and pour into the dip in the flour, followed by the ghee.
3. Knead into a very soft dough and divide into 36 equal portions. Set aside.
4. Roll out each portion and cook on an upturned *tawa* (griddle). Sprinkle ghee on the griddle from time to time. Cook until golden brown. Serve hot.

Seen by: \_\_\_\_\_

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**The galouti kebab literally melts in the mouth. It was made for Nawabs who were too lazy too chew**

almost by accident. *Dum pukht*, means to breathe and to cook. The cuisine owes its excellence to the fact that the food, sealed in a dish and slow cooked in its own juices, retains all its natural aromas and flavours. About 200 years ago, when Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah ordered that the builders of the Bara Imam Bara mosque should have access to food day and night, street cooks assembled giant pots, called *bukharis*, filled them with rice, meat, vegetables and spices and placed them on gently simmering fires. The lids were sealed with dough and topped with hot coals to slow cook the food and keep it warm around the clock. When the Nawab tasted the food during an inspection, he was most impressed, and ordered his chefs to refine the cooking technique in the royal kitchens.

Lucknow is known world wide for its biryanis and different meat preparations. Nihari, a mutton stew, with naan, is typically served for breakfast.

The excellent taste of Avadhi cuisine comes from a culmination of efforts. A traditonal Lucknowi *daavat* (feast) takes three days to prepare. The meat undergoes three marinations, absorbing all the delicate spices and herbs. Then, it is kept simmering overnight on embers. Some dishes require baking all day in clay ovens. The meat dishes consist of kebabs, biryanis, *salans* (stir fried salads), dal goshts – all cooked from the finest and most exotic of ingredients. Lucknowi kitchens are all about huge, fragrant *handis* (pots) of rich food. The recipes nearly always call for heavy cream, raisins, saffron, almonds and cashewnuts. ❧



**GALOUTI KEBAB**

makes 60 kebabs

**ingredients**

- 1 kg mutton, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 15 g ground ginger
- 30 g ground garlic
- 150 g ground raw papaya
- 100 g roasted gram flour
- 90 ml dairy ghee
- 5 g saffron
- 10 ml milk
- 20 g ground cashewnut
- 15 g ground *chironji* (cudpahnut)
- 10 g ground poppy seed
- 7 g ground cloves
- 7 g ground cardamom
- 5 g ground mace
- 3 g grated nutmeg
- 3 g ground black pepper
- 7 g yellow chilli powder
- salt to taste
- a large piece of glowing coal
- 1 tsp garam masala

**method**

1. Clean and wash the mutton chunks and mix with salt.
2. Mince through a meat grinder twice.
3. Add ginger, garlic and papaya, gram flour, ghee, saffron dissolved in milk, cashewnut, chironjee and poppy seed, and the rest of the ingredients and knead to a smooth consistency. Spread on a flat tray.
4. Place the glowing coal in a metal bowl and sprinkle the garam masala over it. Place the bowl in the centre of the mince in the tray. Pour some ghee over the coal and immediately cover with a cloth or a larger pan. Set aside to smoke for 30 min.
5. Divide the mince into 60 equal portions and shape into patties. Heat ghee on griddle and fry patties, turning carefully.
6. Serve hot with *ultey tawa ka paratha*.

