India has a sophisticated and savory history of cuisine—or rather, cuisines. A long history of invasion and colonization, diverse geography, religion, and other factors have actually created a variety of styles of cooking across the subcontinent.

- **In the far North**, the influence of the Persians and Moghuls show up in lamb and rice dishes (biryani) and an aromatic sauce with cream, nuts such as pistachios, and dried fruits known as korma.
- **In the far South**, Keralans use coconut milk as the base for many spicy dishes and a thin rice-flour pancake (dosas) is a specialty. Most South Indians are lactose intolerant but can eat yogurt, while most North Indians enjoy a range of dairy products.
- **Jains and Brahmin Hindus** have created vegetarian cuisines in areas such as Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- **Goans**, heavily influenced by Portuguese colonization, make a fiery pork dish called vindaloo.
- **West Bengalis** take advantage of their access to fish and are known for their very sweet desserts.
As food historian Colleen Taylor Sen explains, we can speak generally of “Indian food” in that all these regional cuisines bear some important similarities:

- Most Indian meals are starch-based, centering on either rice or grain.
- While only 30% of Indians are vegetarian, they consume about one-tenth the animal products as Americans.
- Rice or flatbreads (roti is the general term) are accompanied by pulses or dal (dried beans, mostly chickpeas or types of lentils; soup made from pulses is also called dal) and form the basis of most Indian meals. Vegetables and more rarely meat are added as availability and affordability dictate.
While many dishes are hot, it is mostly spice and not heat that enlivens meals.

Masalas are spice mixtures that help to define certain dishes. Certain ones have become established. The best known here is garam masala, which can contain over 20 spices.

Curry powder is a British invention that mimics a masala; “curry” is a general term for India’s spicy gravies, probably from the Tamil word kari. Neither the term or the powder is used in India; but the fresh leaf of the curry plant—unrelated to the spice mix—is.

Condiments are also important to Indian meals. Vegetable pickles, preserved fruits, chutney (traditionally, a fresh relish; also a British-influenced fruit preserve), and raita (a yoghurt and vegetable salad) add nutrients as well as flavor.

Most middle-class Indians have two main meals, lunch and dinner, with a couple of snacks per day. Dessert dishes are treats, often associated with religious festivals or enjoyed as snacks.

Rice and lentils were staples of India’s earliest inhabitants and sustain Indians today. Yet much of what we think of as Indian is actually quite new. Chai (spiced tea with milk) became popular there only in the 1950s. Even what many Indians would consider the most Indian dish today, tandoori chicken, actually came from (what is now) Pakistan with Peshawari refugees in the late 1940s. And Indian food has taken on new life elsewhere as well. Bhati cooking is a new type of Indian food that developed in Birmingham, England.

Matrichaya
The food, health, and hygiene initiatives that Matrichaya, our featured program, has undertaken are aimed at empowering women to feed themselves and their families better and more regularly and safely. In the food processing course, women learn about nutrition, how to vary their diet, and how to take best advantage of what they have. They learn to preserve the vegetables and fruits that grow well in Dheki Tola in summer for winter use. Among the things they learn to make are vegetable pickles, tomato sauces, and gooseberry preserves. They learn to make flatbreads called missi roti and pappad from nutritious mixes of grains and pulses.

Indian Dining Etiquette
- Indians traditionally do not use cutlery for eating, as many foods - such as Indian breads and curry - are best enjoyed when eating with the hand.
- If the food is soupy, such as many daals, spoons can be used. Additionally, foods such as rice may be eaten with spoons in both North and South India, more so in case of formal occasions as in a restaurant or a buffet where food is not served on banana leaf.
- Spoons (usually two used in a clasping motion) and forks are commonly used to distribute foods from a communal dish, as it is considered rude to touch the foods of others.
- Always use the right hand when eating or receiving food and never the left.
- Hindus consider the cattle to be a sacred animal; beef is considered taboo. Therefore, restaurants in more conservative Indian states, do not include beef dishes in their menu.
- It is not necessary to taste each and every dish prepared; but you must finish everything on the plate as it is considered a respect for served food, and food is sacred. For this reason, take only as much food on the plate as you can finish.
Pappad also has the advantage of being dried for long storage. They learn to use highly nutritional groundnuts (peanuts) in a variety of ways, even in a fudge-like confection called barfi. And, they learn to do something that most Indians do everyday: to add nuts, seeds, and pulses to rice in order to get a protein-rich dish called khichri. A number of agencies are encouraging the planting of second crops, especially groundnuts, pulses, and grains like millet (ragi), in Jharkhand. These are less susceptible to the periodic drought.

Matrichaya also provides women with a means to support themselves. The preserves, sauces, and pappads are sold in Matrichaya’s store at Acqua World, an amusement park in Ranchi. And their products also stock the new village store, along with staples that Urmì once would have had to walk miles to find on her own.

*Our thanks to Carolyn Mayers for providing recipes and Indian cuisine information.*

**Menu**
- **Onion Bhajji**—a favorite Indian street food and good starter
- **Curried Cashews**—A sweet/spicy inspiration
- **Breads: Missi Roti and Pappad**—flatbreads (one soft, the other crisp)
- **Condiments: Green Chutney and Mountain Jam** (go with everything)
- **Khichri with Red Lentils**—the main dish in Jharkhand and elsewhere
- **Kheema Matar**—a lamb main dish, very popular and easy
- **Indian Ratatouille**—Indian spices give a new twist to a potluck favorite
- **Peanut Barfi**—a fudge-like confection
- **Chai-Spiced Almond Cookies**—another sweet inspiration
- **To drink**: Indian Tea, India Pale Ale, fruit juices such as mango or pineapple


**Curried Cashews**

1 large egg white  
1 t frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed  
4 c raw cashews  
1/4 c sugar  
1 t kosher salt plus more for sprinkling  
1 t chili powder  
1/2 t cinnamon  
3/4 t curry powder  
1/4-1 t cayenne powder or other hot chile powder (opt—but a little more spice is good)

Preheat over to 225. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Whip the egg white until stiff peaks form. Add the oj concentrate and whip again. Stir in the cashews, covering them well with the egg mixture. Add everything else and stir until all is blended well and the cashews are coated evenly.
Spread nuts in a single layer on the baking sheet. Bake, stirring every 10 minutes or so, until browned, 40-55 minutes. I like to sprinkle the nuts with more salt about halfway through and at the end—but taste one first. Remove from the oven and immediately loosen the nuts from the paper with a metal spatula. Set aside to cool at least 1 hour, but even better, overnight, before serving. Makes 4 cups.

adapted from http://onehotstove.blogspot.com/2005/12/o-is-for-onion-bhajji.html

NOTE: Matrichaya helps some women set up shops where they sell fried snacks, usually made with vegetables that are popular throughout India. This recipe comes from a wonderful food blog written by an Indian professor in St. Louis named Nupur. While she isn’t from Jharkhand, her recipes and descriptions of Indian cooking are well worth a visit to onehotstove.blogspot.com. She says this about the dish, which is called bhajji in her native Marathi, also known as pakora: “It is found on every street corner in India, often eaten stuffed between slices of bread (a way to convert a cheap snack into a filling meal). It is a favorite of all home cooks, a way of serving up a hot tasty snack using ingredients that are found in every pantry.” These are great with the chutney recipes below. They are mainstays of my party repertoire—just about everybody loves them (think Indian hushpuppies). This should make a dozen or more, depending on the size of your “teaspoonful.”

Onion Bhaji
3 medium onions, peeled, halved and thinly sliced
1 1/2 c chickpea flour (besan) See note on flour below in Missi Roti recipe.
1/3 c minced cilantro
2-4 minced green chiles (optional, substitute minced bell pepper if you like)
1 1/2 t cumin seeds
3/4 t turmeric
1 t coriander powder
salt to taste
Oil for deep-frying

Mix salt into the onions and leave them for 10 minutes. This softens the onions and brings out their juices. Add the rest of the ingredients (except oil) to the onions, stir well, then add just enough water to get a thick batter. (You can hold the mix in the fridge for awhile if you want. Stir well again before cooking.)

In a heavy pot or frying pan, heat enough oil so that teaspoonfuls of batter can float to 350 degrees. Scoop up some batter into a teaspoon (the eating kind), mounding it a bit. Using another teaspoon gently push the batter into the oil. Fry until bhajjis are golden brown and delicious, 2 minutes or so usually. You’ll need to turn them at least once. Remove with a slotted spoon or tongs. Drain well on paper towels. (I usually sprinkle them with salt while they drain.) Note: Making these small ensures the middle cooks before the exterior burns. Wear an apron and don’t lean over the pot as these fry.
Green Chutney
Cilantro grows well in most parts of India, including Jharkhand. A fresh chutney like this provides valuable nutrients as well as flavor. In south India, this might contain coconut and more chilies.

2c. (packed) cilantro
1c. (packed) mint
1/4c green onion, chopped
1-2 green chiles (jalapeno will do), seeded and rough chopped
2 T dry roasted peanuts, chopped a bit
2 T whole-milk yogurt or sour cream
1 t sugar
1 t cumin powder
1/2 t salt (maybe more to taste)
Juice of one lime

Blend everything together in a food processor or blender, adding just enough water to make a dip for roti or pappadum (about the consistency of creamy salad dressing). Adjust the seasonings. Be conservative with the chilies at first, adding more if you wish more heat. Make this a couple of hours ahead and chill. The flavors really develop. You can give the seasonings a final adjustment before serving if needed. You can leave out the nuts, but they add nice crunch and body. The color may not stay quite as lively, but this is good the next day.

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Mountain Jam
This is an Indian-inspired recipe, but reminiscent of the preserves made by the Dheki Tola women. You’ll find a zillion uses for it—it is easy and delicious. If you can, allow the flavors to develop several days before serving. But it’s good after an overnight rest. Keeps very well in the fridge.

12 garlic cloves
1 (2-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled & coarsely chopped
1 1/4 cups red-wine vinegar
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 teaspoon brown mustard seeds
6 fenugreek seeds
1/4 teaspoon cumin seeds
1/4 teaspoon fennel seeds
1 (28 oz) can whole tomatoes in juice, chopped, reserving juice
3/4 cup sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon cayenne or to taste
1. Purée garlic, ginger, and 1/2 cup vinegar in a blender.
2. Heat oil in a 2- to 3-quart heavy saucepan over moderately high heat until hot but not smoking and add mustard seeds. When seeds begin to pop, stir in fenugreek, cumin, and fennel. Add garlic mixture, then cook over moderate heat, stirring, 1 minute. Add tomatoes (with juice), remaining 3/4 cup vinegar, sugar, salt, and cayenne and bring to a boil.
3. Reduce heat and simmer chutney, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 1 1/2 to 2 hours (lower heat as necessary). You should have about 2 cups.
4. Transfer chutney to a bowl. Cool, uncovered, then chill, covered, at least 1 week to allow flavors to develop. This is spicy, but not hot.

**Pappads (“pappadam,” “pappadum”)**
Leave the making of these to the professional women of Lijiit (or other brands if necessary). Pappads (the north Indian name; it’s “pappadam” in southern India and in many India stores in the U.S.) are round wafers (usually about 6” in diameter) that are dried like pasta and need to be cooked very briefly by frying, roasting over a gas flame, or microwaving. They are easy and quick to prepare.

**Missi Roti**
“Missi” refers to the mix of nutritious flours used in this flatbread. Recipes vary according to regions and cooks in India. The spices indicated here are traditional for Jharkhand, but you can feel free to omit some of them if need be. This is easier and faster than it sounds and worth the effort. They’re fun to make in a group, with some people rolling and others cooking. The dough can be made a couple of hours ahead and kept at room temperature wrapped in plastic.

Makes 18-20 roti. (They are similar to soft tortillas, but very different in flavor.)

**Note on Flours:** *King Arthur Whole Wheat Flour works fine for this. Chickpea flour can be found in Indian or Middle Eastern Groceries. Even though the types of chickpeas differ in these regions, you can use Middle Eastern chickpea flour here just as well. The other flours can be found in Indian or Asian groceries or health/whole food stores.*
4 c total of mixed flours, 1/2 c each: atta (whole wheat), besan (chickpea), ragi (millet), and rice flour. Or, use 2 c each whole wheat and chickpea flours. See note above.
2 T semolina or farina (optional)
1T wheat germ (optional)
1 t whole cumin seed
1 t ground coriander
1 t fenugreek powder or 2T dry fenugreek leaves (kasser methi), ground (Indian stores will have this; if you can’t find it, don’t worry, they’ll still taste good.)
1/2-1 t chile powder or paprika (you can use a mild or hot powder or a mixture)
1 1/2 t salt
1/4 t turmeric
2 T vegetable oil (plus a little more for the pan)
2 T chopped cilantro
room temperature water, about 1/2 cup

If you have a mixer with a dough hook or a food processor, this is quick work. Blend together all the dry ingredients. Throw in the cilantro if using. Add the oil to the water and while the machine runs, slowly pour it in. Allow the dough to come together and knead a bit. You want a soft, smooth dough. Add more water if too dry or whole wheat flour if too wet and knead again if necessary. Wrap in plastic and allow to rest for at least 30 minutes.

Knead the dough again slightly and divide it into balls. Roll out the balls into tortilla-like 5 1/2” round flatbreads. (They don’t have to perfect and a tear or two won’t hurt.)

Heat a griddle or cast iron pan and when hot, coat the bottom with just a film of oil. Begin to cook the roti. Place one in the prepared pan and cook for about 20 seconds. Check the bottom. If it’s darkened a bit and you see some brown or black spots, turn it. Do the same on the other side. When done, place the roti aside and cook another. As they finish cooking, you can stack the roti on top of each other. Keep warm in foil. You can make these ahead, even freeze and reheat them.
adapted from http://onehotstove.blogspot.com/2006/06/exact-recipe-for-chaotic-dish.html with help from Dr. Archana Mishra

**Khichri with Red Lentils**

This is the real national dish of India, eaten twice a day by many. Depending on the region and the cook, it can be prepared with a variety of pulses (mainly, types of lentils) and may be “wet “ (soupy) or “dry” (more like a pilaf, but still “mushy”). The women of Dheki Tola were taught to make it with red lentils, which are cheaper than other varieties there.

The word (also appearing as “khichdi,” “khitchri,” “khitcheri”) means “hodge-podge,” “mess,” or “chaos” and has come to be used for everything from government foibles to silly movies, according to Nupur at One Hot Stove.
Khichri is a food served to the ailing and small children and considered a humble comfort food by those who are able to eat more richly—sort of an Indian grits and gravy! I’ve adapted Nupur’s recipe, which she calls “Khichdi,” to fit with what Dr. Mishra has told me about the way it’s done in Jharkhand. Khichri could be an accompaniment to curries, but it is more typically eaten as the main dish with a vegetable pickle and roti. It can be made and reheated the next day—and even improves a bit as the flavors develop. You may need to add a little more water in reheating and watch for sticking.

1 c masoor dal (red split lentils)
1 c rice (preferably basmati or patna, but any long grain white rice)
1 t cumin seed
1 t brown mustard seed
4 T minced onion
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 t turmeric
1/2 t red chili powder, like cayenne (opt)
2 t coriander powder
1 t cumin powder
1T salt, or to taste
2 T vegetable oil
Ghee (or melted butter), cilantro, chopped peanuts for garnish (opt)

1. Soak the lentils and rice in water to cover by an inch for an hour, if you have time (not necessary, but improves cooking). Rinse and drain anyway.
2. Heat the oil in a saucepan. Add the cumin and mustard and cook for a few seconds until the mustard seed begin to pop.
3. Add the onion and garlic and cook a couple of minutes, stirring. Add the other spices and any additional vegetables (see note below).
4. Add rice and lentils and stir. Add five cups of water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cover. Simmer twenty minutes or until the rice and lentils are done. (If begins to dry out, add more water.) This should be pretty wet. Allow to sit off heat, covered, another 5 minutes.

Note: Remember, this should be a “mushy mess” not a fluffy pilaf. Some cooks add a little warm ghee (melted butter works) and some chopped cilantro on top to finish. In the food processing course, the women also were encouraged to add peanuts for more protein. For a “wet” khichri, as it would be eaten in Jharkhand, add another cup of water in step 4. (This version is pretty “wet” as is, but still edible with a fork.) You may also add up to 1 1/2c sautéed, blanched, or frozen (thawed) diced vegetables such as carrots, cauliflower, green peas, chopped greens, or a mixture, in step 3. If using vegetables, add 1/2c more water in step 4. This should feed 6 or more at a potluck.

adapted from Madhur Jaffrey’s Indian Cooking (Barron’s, 1995)
Kheema Matar
This main dish is also a favorite Indian comfort food and a staple at my house. It’s not spicy, simple, but very good. It can be eaten at room temperature with roti or warm with rice. This amount serves 6 or more on a buffet. Double if you like. Add a can of drained tomatoes (with the water) if you like.

4 T oil
1 1/2 lbs ground lamb
3 oz finely chopped onion
4 large garlic cloves, minced
1” cube of fresh ginger, peeled and minced or grated
1-2 green chilies (opt)
1/4 t chili flake (opt)
1 1/2 t salt
1 t ground cumin
1 t ground coriander
10 oz. water
6 oz frozen green peas
4 T chopped cilantro
1 t garam masala (see note below)
1 1/2 T lemon juice

Note: If you can’t find garam masala, here’s a quick version: 1T each: ground cardamom and cinnamon. 1 t each: ground cinnamon, cloves, and black pepper. 1/2 t ground nutmeg. Mix well.

Put 2 T oil in a large skillet and heat. Add the lamb, breaking it up and cooking it just until it isn’t pink. Drain the lamb in a colander or on layers of paper towels. Heat the remaining 2T oil. Add the onion and cook until it’s light brown. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute. Add the chilies and spices through the salt and stir to combine well. Add the meat back, stirring well. Add 6oz of the water, bring to a boil. Cover, turn heat to low, and simmer 30 minutes. Add the rest of the ingredients and bring back to a simmer. Cover and cook 10 minutes longer. Adjust seasonings if need be. This can be related but improves with a last minute addition of lemon juice and chopped cilantro.
adapted from Chef Floyd Cardoz @ www.epicurious.com via McCullough, The Best American Recipes 2001-2002 (Houghton Mifflin, 2001)

Indian Ratatouille
This comes from Tabla, an acclaimed Manhattan Indian restaurant, but is homey and goes well with the two main dishes here or works as a veggie main on its own with rice or roti. It makes good use of the last of the warm season vegetables too. Indian vegetable recipes often begin with frying whole spices. You can substitute green or red peppers for part of the eggplant or the zucchini.
1/4 c vegetable oil
1 T mustard seeds (brown or yellow)
1 T cumin seeds
8 oz onion, cut in 1/2” pieces
1 green chile, chopped fine
2 T chopped fresh ginger
1 1/2 lb eggplant in 1/2” pieces
2 medium zucchini in 1/2” pieces
1 15 oz can diced tomatoes, drained
3 large garlic cloves, chopped fine
1 t salt (plus more to taste)
2T chopped cilantro
1 T lemon juice

Heat oil in a large heavy pot. Add the seeds and cook until they begin to pop (2 minutes). Add the onion, chile, and ginger. Cook 1 minute. Add the eggplant and zucchini and cook, stirring, 5 minutes. Cover and cook 5 minutes longer. Mix in the tomatoes and garlic. On medium heat, cook, covered, until the vegetables are tender and everything is well blended, stirring occasionally, about 25 minutes. Add the cilantro, lemon juice, and salt to taste. Serve warm or at room temp. Serves at least 6.

Peanut Barfi

Peanuts (groundnuts) may be most appropriate in honoring Dheki Tola since the women were taught how to make barfi with them, but cashews, walnuts, almonds, pistachios or a mixture may be used.

2 c raw skinned peanuts (8 oz.)
3/4 c sugar
1/4 c milk or warm water
1 T butter

1. Place the nuts in a bowl. Pour boiling water over them to cover, and soak for 1 hour. Drain the nuts, put them in the container of an electric blender or food processor, and reduce them to a fine paste (adding a little milk or water if the paste begins to clog).
2. Cut a large sheet of foil (a foot long). Butter the foil.
3. Heat a non-stick frying pan (at least 9 inches in diameter) over medium heat for 2 minutes. Add the nut paste and the sugar. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook, stirring and scraping the sides and bottom of the pan constantly with a flat spatula for 20 minutes or until the fudge is thick and sticky. Stir in the butter.
4. Spread the fudge onto the prepared foil. Spread it evenly into a 7 or 8” square by patting it with the spatula. (Do this quickly before it cools and hardens.) Finely chopped roasted nuts or slivers of candied cherry pressed onto the top before it cools dress it up.
For festivities, Indians with means might press edible silver leaf on top, as pictured below.

5. When its cool and solid, cut into 1/2”x2” or so rectangles. Makes about 3 1/2 dozen tiny bars. Barfi keeps well, if stored tightly sealed, at room temperature for 3 weeks and for several months in the refrigerator.

**Note:** To call this “fudge” is a little misleading. It isn’t nearly as creamy as some American fudge and in fact tends to clump during cooking. But don’t worry: You smooth it out as you press it onto the foil to cool. It has a rather dry texture but holds together well once it sets. It is hot when you take it out of the pan, so be careful.

**Chai-Spiced Almond Cookies**

The spices of Moghul Indian give new life to the old snowball cookie. This recipe makes not quite 2 dozen. Multiply as needed. Make these a couple of days ahead (flavor improves), place in an air-proof container, and hide them until your meeting! As you’d expect from the name, these are good with a spot of tea.

1/2 c unsalted butter, room temp  
1 1/3 c powdered sugar, divided (1/3c + 1c)  
2 t vanilla extract  
1 t almond extract  
3/4 t ground allspice  
3/4 t ground cardamom  
1/2 t ground cinnamon  
1/4 t salt  
1 c all purpose flour  
3/4 c finely chopped toasted almonds (food processor does this best)

Preheat over to 350. With a mixer, beat butter, 1/3c sugar, the extracts, spices, and salt. Beat in flour. Stir in almonds.

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Changing the world one dinner at a time