

Exploring the fascination of Indian cuisine

As part of its celebration of Indian Independence Day (Aug. 15), the Indian Cultural Center in Denpasar served delicious Indian food. Puneth Malhootra of Queen Tandoor restaurant, Seminyak, shares his knowledge on the history of the country's cuisine.

India: The name always conjures up vivid images of a surreal land where ancient mystique, maharajas, history, magic and dazzling colors seamlessly intertwine with chaos, creating a sensual overload.

That is because India is not just a country; it is a symphony of cultures, people, races, languages, ever shifting and on the move. Home to over a billion people and over a hundred languages, traditions and festivals, it never ceases to amaze. Every day is new, every experience raw, the surprises never cease here.

The origins of Indian Cuisine lie with the ancient Indian civilization of India that was called Harappa and Mohenjodaro. The Dravidians or inhabitants of these civilizations were urban and not agrarian.

They had huge granaries to store grain, houses with a drainage system, pathways or roads and public baths. They sowed the seeds of Ayurveda, or Life Sciences, which is the foundation of Indian cuisine. This system was derived after studying the physical needs, mental needs and needs of our psychology and spirituality.

India has a culinary culture unique to it and it consists of the tradition of vegetarianism, which was reinstated in India during the 5th century B.C. India may have been vegetarian during the Mohenjodaro and Harappa civilizations. I do not know for sure as its script has not been unlocked.

I do know that the Aryans who migrated to India, and took control of Northern India, were meat-eating people. During the ancient Aryan

ahimsa by following a vegetarian diet and regarding it as superior to the Brahminical ideas of animal sacrifice.

Meat was consumed only after the animal was sacrificed to the gods. Among the animals that were sacrificed in Vedic times was the cow, which is considered taboo in the Hinduism of today.

People always ask why is beef is forbidden for Indian Hindus.

The cow is considered sacred for the following reasons:

- The cow was regarded as one's mother as it sacrificed the milk meant for its calf and provided milk for the people. It is therefore perceived as a "mother" symbol in India.
- The cow was also kept at many Indian homes for its milk and the animal became a part of the family.
- At the beginning of the Epic period (c.1000 B.C. to 800 B.C.), meat was said to be common food that added vigor not only to the body but also to the mind. A theory suggests that during the 5th century it was discovered that the cattle population was decreasing at an alarming rate. People began to realize that a live cow was a greater asset than its meat.
- Ghee (clarified butter), milk and yogurt were vital for temple rituals, so the animal began to enjoy a greater value alive.
- In the Atharvaveda (Vedic text) beef-eating was prohibited as it was likened to committing a sin against one's ancestors.

Other factors that contributed to the rise of vegetarianism in India were that kings such as Ashoka (born in 322 B.C.) discouraged the



A display of Indian food illustrates some of the variety offered by this cuisine.

This was the start of the taboo of eating beef in India.

One of India's most famous dishes is curry. Curry is an English word most probably derived from the south Indian *kaikaari*. *Kaikaari*, or its shortened version, *kaari*, meant vegetables cooked with spices and a dash of coconut. It may have become the symbolic British word for Indian dishes that could be eaten with rice. In India "curry" means gravy.

In Indonesia, many believe curry is an Indian spice. Curry powder is sold in many supermarkets. Many dishes in Indonesia call for curry powder, which is actually a blend of spices (mainly garam masala) that is mixed with coriander powder and turmeric. In India, Indians would be confused if you mentioned curry powder.

There is a plant, however, that has leaves that are called *curry leaves*, or in Hindi *meetha neem* or *kadhi* leaves. They look like miniature lemon leaves and grow wild in most forest regions of India and are used as a seasoning.

Curry is now an international dish recognized the world over. It is a dish with gravy (or a stew-like dish) and had many spices and seasonings and is flavored with hot and sour tastes.

Curry may or may not be made with curry powder. Curry powder ingredients include: black pepper, chili, cloves, coriander, fenugreek, cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, ginger turmeric and nutmeg.

A "dry" curry simply means that there is less liquid involved in the cooking process than you would normally associate with a curry.

WHERE TO GO IN BALI

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I do know that the Aryans who migrated to India, and took control of Northern India, were meat eating people. During the ancient Aryanvedic period meat was consumed regularly after an animal sacrifice to the Gods.

This changed with the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, the founders of which preached the principle of ahimsa or "nonviolence". The Brahman priests who conducted animal sacrifices as offerings to God, also began to appreciate this sentiment as swept India.

They began to embrace Ahimsa by following a vegetarian diet and regarding it as superior to the Brahminical ideas of animal sacrifice.

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Other factor that contributed to the rise vegetarianism in India were that king such as Ashoka (born in 322 B.C) discouraged the killing of animals.

- Powerful benevolent and popular Emperor Ashoka popularized a vegetarian cuisine. even today. A majority of Indians are vegetarian.
- The two other the Individuals that helped make India vegetarian are Mahavir and Budha, who were India greatest Spiritual teachers, (also the ancient, urban Dravidian civilizations may hane been vegetarian).

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