

# RAJASTHANI CUISINE

## INTRODUCTION

- Fascinating Rajasthan Cuisines were influenced by the **geomorphology and political conditions** of the region of Rajasthan.
- Like the state itself, its inhabitants and their rich culture, Rajasthani cuisine is a splendid array of **colourful, spicy and unique** dishes.
- The availability of all types of food was a rarity here and the preservation of the food was the main criteria because of the desert conditions and war situations of Rajasthan. Rarely has the world seen so rich a cuisine from so little that was available from the land of Rajasthan.
- **Thar**, the Great Indian Desert, immortalised in song and folklore as *Marusthali* (The land of Death) lies in north-west Rajasthan, but not all of this state is wasteland. The **Arawali hills**, the oldest geographical feature of the Indian-subcontinent, is a rocky spine that divides Rajasthan into two regions of startling contrasts: one is barren while the other has lakes, forests and fertile land.
- While the **eastern region of Rajasthan has fertile soil** capable of crops of everything from wheat and maize to millets and corn, for much part the **desert's dry terrain, prone to droughts**, was incapable of producing even basic necessities of survival. Yet, live and eat they did, creating an exotic cuisine from the soil that threw up a few pulses, crops of millet, and trees with beans that were dried and stored for use when, in the summers, nothing would grow.
- Land of Princes, as Rajasthan is called, shows off the royal kitchens of Rajasthan in which the preparation of food was a very complex matter and was raised to the levels of an art form. Thus the '**Khansamas**' (the royal cooks) worked in the stately palaces and kept their most enigmatic recipes to themselves.

## HISTORICAL INFLUENCE IN THE RAJASTHANI CUISINE

- Rajasthani cooking has its own unique flavour and the simplest; the most basic of ingredients go into the preparation of most of the dishes in Rajasthan.
- The cuisine of Rajasthan was highly influenced by both the **war-like lifestyles of its inhabitants and the availability of ingredients** in the desert region in Rajasthan.
- Scarcity of water and lack of fresh green vegetables also had their effect on Rajasthani cooking.
- Food that could last for several days and could be eaten without heating was preferred, more out of necessity than choice in Rajasthan.
- The passion of the **Maharajas of Rajasthan for shikar** (hunting) has been largely responsible for shaping the culinary art in Rajasthan. In the world of good eating, game cooking is easily the most respected art form in Rajasthan, largely because the skills required to clean, cut and cook game are not easily acquired.

- With the **Pathani invasions**, filtered in the art of barbecuing which has now been honed to perfection and the quintessential sula-smoked kebabs or skewered boneless lamb-can be prepared in 11 different ways.
- On the other hand is the vegetarian cooking of the **Maheshwaris of Marwar** or Jodhpur in Rajasthan, who do not use even garlic and onions, as these are said to excite the blood. The **Marwaris of Rajasthan**, of course, were vegetarian too, but their cuisine, though not too different from the Rajputs, was richer in its method of preparation. And then there were the **Jains** too in Rajasthan, who were not only vegetarians, but *who would not eat after sundown, and whose food had to be devoid of garlic and onions* which were, otherwise, important ingredients in the Rajasthani pot.
- The unique creation of the **Maharaja of Salwar is the Junglee maas**. Junglee maas was a great favourite among the Maharajas and due to the paucity of exotic ingredients in the camp kitchen, the game brought in from the hunt was simply cooked in pure ghee, salt and plenty of red chillies of Rajasthan.
- The **Vaishnavs, followers of Krishna, were vegetarian**, and strictly so, as were the **Bishnois**, a community known for their passion to conserve both animal and plant life. Even among *Rajputs*, there were enough royal kitchens where nothing other than vegetarian meals was cooked.
- The personal recipes of the royal **KHANSAMA** still rotate around their generations and are the highlights of regal gatherings of Rajasthan. Each state of Rajasthan had their own style of the recipes which is continued in the Rajput households. It was mainly the men folks of the family that prepared the non-vegetarian. Some of the Maharajas apart from being great hunters relished the passion of cooking the **SHIKARS** themselves for their chosen guests and the trend continues among the generation of Rajasthan

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CUISINE**

The food style of this glorious desert state of India has been affected by the natural topography and indigenously available ingredients like most other civilizations of the world. A lack of leafy green vegetables, a pronounced use of lentils, pulses, legumes and the use of milk, curd and buttermilk in place of the water in the gravy marks the essentials of Rajasthani cuisine.

### **Some salient features can be discussed as follows:**

- The cooking of Rajasthan was immensely influenced by the **war-like and belligerent way of life of its people and the accessibility of the ingredients** that were grown in this region. Rajasthani food is well known for its **spicy curries and delicious sweets**.
- Major crops of Rajasthan are **Jowar, Bajri, Maize, Ragi, Rice, Wheat, Barely, Gram, Tur, pulses, Ground nut, Sesame etc. Millets, lentils and beans are most basic ingredients in food**.
- In a land where ordinary vegetables like potatoes and cauliflowers can not be grown, the people of Marwar have learnt to supplement their diet by using whatever the environment has to offer, be it from a tree, a bush, a plant or a creeper. For instance, '**kachri**' (*cucumis melo*), '**fofliya**' (*citrullus lanatus*), '**khumattiya**' (*it is a small circular, flat, black-brown colored herb which*

*is picked from the tree Kumatiya, spread naturally all over in the desert of Thar), 'gawar' (cyamopsis tetragonoloba) etc* are all regarded as vegetables. Besides several types of **melons and cucumbers** are also used and are considered exotic.

- Rajasthani food is characterized by the use of Jowar, Bajra, legumes and lentils, its distinct aroma and flavour achieved by the **blending of spices including curry leaves, tamarind, coriander, ginger, garlic, chili, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, cumin and rosewater**. Other spices commonly used are powdered cumin seeds (jeera), fennel seeds or aniseed (saunf), fenugreek seeds (methi dana), nigella seeds (kalonji), carom seeds (ajwain), cloves (laung or loong), garlic, dried ginger (soonth), amchoor (dried mango powder), mustard seeds (rai), kasuri methi (dried coarsely powdered fenreek leaves), asafoetida (heing), cinnamon (dalchini), etc. These are generally powdered in a heavy iron mortar and pestle just before adding to the food to retain their coarse texture and natural flavour.
- The Rajasthani cuisine uses a lot of **dry coconut**.
- **Clarified butter or ghee** forms the main medium of cooking.
- **Till or gingelly**, used primarily to extract oil, is another crop that grows here and finds its way into the foods of Marwa. The cooking oils that are commonly used in the Rajasthani cuisine are mainly oils such as vegetable oils like sunflower, canola and peanut oil.
- **Dried lentils, beans** from indigenous plants like *sangri, ker* etc. are liberally used. **Gram flour** is the major ingredient in the making of a couple of delicacies such as "pakodi" and "gatte ki sabzi". **Powdered lentils** are liberally used in the preparation of papad, mangodi etc.
- These robust desert people have also perfected the skill of drying vegetables. Thus **fresh green chillies or dry red ones** are integral to their diet and are made into snacks, curries, pickles and chutneys. *One reason why they consume enormous quantities of chillies is because they grow them.* A preference for flavourings which can be stored for long times in normal weather conditions characterizes the local cuisine. **Red chillies of Rajasthan** are famous worldwide. These may be used either whole or coarsely powdered. They lend the gravies not only a bright red/orange colour but also their fiery, scalding flavour.
- A distinct feature of the *Maheshwari cooking* is the use of **mango powder**, a suitable substitute for tomatoes, scarce in the desert, and **asafoetida**, to enhance the taste in the absence of garlic and onions.
- The meat prepared was mainly of **hare or rabbit, wild boar or deer or game birds**.
- The meat dishes were classified into **Lal Maas (red meat) or Safed Maas (white meat)**. The Lal Maas was prepared in rich gravy of tomatoes and spices such as the scalding red chillies. The white meat was however stuffed with dry fruits such as raisins and pistachio and slow cooked in a gravy of cashew, cream, coconut and blanched almonds and laced with powdered spices such as cardamom and cinnamon.

- **Goat and camel milk** form the basis of the various dairy products used in Rajasthani cuisine. Camel's milk is thicker and richer and produces excellent yoghurt (dahi), butter, ghee, malai, khoa and soft cheeses such as paneer.
- The cuisine of Rajasthan is **primarily vegetarian** and offers a fabulous variety of mouthwatering dishes. **The spice content is quite high in comparison to other Indian cuisines**, but the food is absolutely scrumptious.
- Rajasthanis use **ghee** for cooking most of the dishes..
- In the desert belts of Rajasthan, it is preferred to use **milk, butter milk and butter in larger quantities to minimize the amount of water while cooking food.**
- **Bread rather than rice forms the staple food of the Rajasthanis.** This is because rice does not grow well in these dry sandy soils. Wheat breads such as rotis are indeed the staple food. Wheat products such as *atta (wheat flour)*, *dalia (cracked wheat)* and *maida (refined flour)* are commonly used to make the bread. *Chapattis and Parathas* are unleavened flat bread that are cooked on the direct flame and served dry or shallow fried. Puri and Kachauri too are smaller pieces of bread and these deep fried till they are crisp, golden and fluffy. *Laapsi*, made of dalia is an all time favorite. *Missi Roti and Tikadia* are shallow fried rotis stuffed with an assortment of spices. Due to the natural habitat of the region, *jowar (sorghum)*, *bajra (pearl millet)* and *makai (corn)* grow well. The flour of these are used very often to make rotis and make nutritious substitutes to the ordinary roti such as *Jowar ki Roti, Bajre ki Roti, Chane ki Roti* etc are common household variations of the wheat rotis.
- **Rice finds limited use** in the pulaos and such preparations in the Rajput households but it does not form the staple main course of most households in the state.
- **Pickles and chutneys** of Rajasthan are famous accompaniments to their main fare. *Tamatar ki Launji, Lehsun ki Chutney, Imly ki Chutney Aam Launji and Pudina Chutney* are common titbits that give a bland meal the tang required and have excellent digestive properties. *Moong Dal Papads, Masala Papads, Mangodis, Pakodis and Badis* are used instead of vegetables in many dishes.
- Native Rajasthanis have a unique style of **coupling the sweet dishes with the main (bread/roti/puri) course** instead of or in addition to vegetables or meat. Halwa - Puri for example makes a famous combination. Here again we find a great use of pulses, legumes, dairy products etc and a unique style of rustling up the desserts. A great use of clarified butter (ghee) characterizes the sweets.
- **Snacks** of different types form an integral part of the cuisine. *Bhujia, Boondis, Sohali, and crisp Nimkis* are the classic recipes of Rajasthani snacks. These can be stored and used over a long period of time. *Chillas, Dahi Badas, Dahi Kachauris and Kanji Badas* make for lighter meals and need to be consumed soon after preparation.

### **COOKING EQUIPMENTS USED IN RAJASTHAN**

- **TIKRA:** This is a clay pot that is typically used for the preparation of a dal called tikri ki dal. The much desired earthly flavour of the dal is obtained in this manner.
- **CHULAH:** In the olden days, stoves were made out of mud and cow dung cakes were the most commonly used fuel. The low flame of the chulah would cook the food slowly allowing better infusion of the flavour of the spices.
- **SIGRI:** This is an open bar – be – queued griller used for grilling kebabs such as *maas ke sooley*.

Very little ‘special’ equipment would be needed to prepare your Rajasthani cuisine. Pots and pans those are non-sticky of course as they make the best utensils for simply any type of cooking, so try getting a hold of a few of those if you do not have them already. Moreover, using wooden stirrers in place of stainless steel ones is the best choice always. Even so, it is always exciting to know about and if you wish to cook with specialized Rajasthani equipment. If you are a creative and innovative cook and want to prepare your Indian meal in the true traditional Rajasthani Indian style then it will not be a bad idea to invest into getting a ‘Tawa’. The traditional Rajasthani breads such as chapattis, parathas and rotis are all made using the tawa. Karahi is another deep frying pot which looks quite like a Chinese wok but it is heavier and deeper than the former. The karahi makes a great alternative for ordinary deep frying recipes. Commonly the meat dishes are prepared in the karahi. Other than the traditional Indian tawa and karahi, spice grinders, food processors or electric blenders are always useful to make your cooking easy and joyful. Getting a hold of a few metal skewers for meat and vegetable threading is also a handy utensil. Other than that, electric spice grinder or a simple pestle and mortar are invaluable for grinding small quantities of spices. Food processors or electric blenders usually save a lot of your cooking hours and make your preparation of the Rajasthani cooking even easier.

#### **A NOTE ON THE COOKING METHODS:**

Although no specific method which is ‘special’ is used while preparing your Rajasthani cuisine, nevertheless there are various methods used in the preparation process of the Rajasthan cooking. If you are looking for perfect results to stem out then it is better to stick to the old traditional manner of preparing your Rajasthani cuisine. Some of the few cooking methods and styles applied in Rajasthani cooking are the many and highly distinctive in their nature. The preparation methods applied in the Rajasthani cooking were first used when man discovered fire. A lamb or chicken which is usually prepared with rice, spices and water is prepared in a highly simple manner. Another type of method that involves the preparation of the Rajasthani cooking is grilling the seasoned lamb or chicken on flat stones that are usually placed on top of burning embers. There is also a quick cooking preparation form of the whole wheat in the Rajasthani cuisine that is cleaned and parboiled, dried, ground into particles and sifted into distinct sizes. It usually comes in four particular forms of grind sizes which further provide different textures and cooking properties for a range of food applications.

#### **RAJASTHANI EATING CUSTOM:**

MARWARIS are the business communities of Rajasthan and are also known as banias. These people are mostly vegetarian and some of them even do not include onion and garlic in the food. The kitchen of a Marwari household is considered to be a very sacred place and entry is limited. Only the ladies of the house or a professional cook called *Maharaja* are allowed to enter it. The cook is also responsible to serve the food from the pots to the plates (thali). A thali is a large metal plate and has an

arrangement of many small bowls called katoris which consist of vegetables and accompaniments. Some of the large thalis served for the royal families contained as many as 56 items on the thali and such a lavish fare is often referred to as **chappan bhog**.

Non vegetarian food is also consumed, specially by the Rajputs.

The daily food in Rajasthan generally includes roti (bread) made of wheat, millet, barley or maize with gatte-ki-sabzi, pickles, and curries. Curries generally are made from Besan and curds.

### **SOME COMMON DISHES IN THIS CUISINE:**

- **LAAL MAAS:** These red meat are made using lamb, yoghurt, onions, and garlic. This dish uses a typical chilli called *manthania chilli* that is indigenous to Rajasthan. This dish is uniquely smoked with cloves to give an enriched flavour to the meat.
- **SAFED MAAS:** It is a signature lamb preparation from Rajasthan. Its white curry is made from the use of fresh coconut kernel paste, white pepper, cashew nuts, poppy seeds, almond, etc. along with yoghurt and onion paste laced with powdered spices such as cardamom and cinnamon. Safed Maas is favorite dish of the Kachchwaha family of Jaipur.
- **KHUD KHARGOSH:** Khud Khargosh (Hare or rabbit meat cooked in a pit) is a Rajput specialty during summer in Rajasthan, when the hare is lean. The hare is skinned and stuffed with spices, wrapped in dough and finally in layers of mud-soaked cloth. The ambrosial result is meat perfectly blended with the spices and dough.
- **SOOLEY:** In Rajput cuisine, *sooley* refers to tender morsels of meat, the most prized being wild boar spare ribs (bhanslas), marinated in a mixture of dry yogurt, browned onions, garlic, ginger, coriander, red chilli, and kachri (a small pod which tenderizes meat) and lends a particular sharp-sour flavour to many dishes. The marinated meat is smoked, spitted on skewers, and grilled over hot coals. *Sooley* are made of chicken, pheasant, mutton, or fish. **Example of sooley: MAAS KE SOOLEY:** This dish is normally eaten as an appetizer. Thin slices of lamb are first marinated overnight in buttermilk and salt. Next day the buttermilk is discarded and the meat is marinated in mustard oil, red chilli powder, cloves, and black pepper. The meat is skewered into thick iron rods and cooked on a charcoal grill.
- **KER SANGRI:** *KER* (unripe fruits of "*Capparis decidua*" tree), *SANGRI* (*Sangri* refers to the beans from the tree "*Prosopis cineraria*", which has very deep roots, enabling it to store water for up to 7 months). This is a preparation which is almost similar to a pickle and can be eaten cold or warm. They are soaked in turmeric water and then mixed with mustard oil and pickling spices.
- **DAL BAATI CHURMA:** This is a classical combination of three dishes eaten together. Dal is also known as panchmel dal, as it is a combination of five types of lentils cooked with garlic and desi ghee. The *Baat*is are dumplings of wholewheat flour, baked on dry cow dung cakes called *kandas*. *Churma* is a sweetened cereal powder made by frying wholewheat flour and desi ghee.
- **GATTE:** Rajsthani *gatte* are made by kneading gram flour with yoghurt, mustard oil, dried fenugreek leaves, turmeric, and salt into a dough. The dough is rolled into long cylindrical shapes and poached in salt water. The

gattes are then cut into 1 inch long pieces and deep fried. This is now simmered in yoghurt – based yellow gravy.

- **MANGODI KI SUBJI:** *Mongodis* are made by soaking lentils in water until they are soft. They are then ground without addition of water and combined with red chilli powder, turmeric and coriander powder. These are then pinched into cherry size and dried in the sun for a couple of days. These *mongodis* can be stored upto a few months. It is often deep fried and combined with vegetables to make dry preparation and curries.
- **MAKKI KA SOWETA:** The *Soweta* is a spicy combination of lamb and corn. The meat is marinated with yoghurt, a paste of garlic, deseeded green chillies, onions along with coriander powder, red chilli powder, turmeric and salt. The corn is roughly chopped. These are made to *bhunao* till brown, little moisture added and cooked till the meat is tender.
- **AMRUD KI SABJI:** This is an exquisite delicacy of guava simmered in a tangy tomato and yoghurt masala.
- **KHAD:** A multi – tiered cake of lamb mince and phulka – a magnificent meal in itself. *Khad* means a hole in the ground. Originally, the ‘cake’ was baked in a hole in the ground with charcoals and hot sand providing the heat.
- **MONGIDI CHAWAL:** It is prepared with rice and fried lentil dumplings known as *mongodis*. It is prepared by putting whole hot spices in the ghee followed by some sliced onions, ginger juliennes, and other spices. The soaked rice is added and cooked along with fried *mongodis*.
- **GATTE KI TAHIRI:** This is a contemporary Rajasthani preparation of *besan gate* that are layered with basmati rice along with flavoured spices and saffron cooked on dum.
- **MISSI ROTI:** This is a very famous bread prepared by kneading gram flour, wholewheat flour, chopped onions, and green chillies into a dough. The chapattis are rolled out from this dough and cooked on a tawa.
- **CHILLA:** *Besan ka chilla* is a very common street food from Rajasthan. It can be made from besan or moong dal. This moong dal is soaked and then made into a coarse paste. It is then mixed with salt, chopped onions, green chillies, and chopped green coriander and left to ferment for an hour. It is then spread like a *dosa* on a hot plate and stuffed with grated *paneer* and folded over to a half moon. It is served hot with garlic chutney.
- **RAJASTHANI DESSERTS:**

Native Rajasthanis have a unique style of coupling the sweet dishes with the main (bread/roti/puri) course instead of or in addition to vegetables or meat. Halwa - Puri for example makes a famous combination. Here again we find a great use of *pulses, legumes, dairy products* etc and a unique style of rustling up the desserts. A great use of *clarified butter (ghee)* characterizes the sweets. These are over cooked and often *chashni (caramel)* based. Halwas and Chakkis are a must on most festive occasion. A variety of dal ka halwas are made using lentils such as *Moong Dal ka Halwa, made of green gram (split) or semolina (Sooji ka Halwa)*. Ajmer is famous for its *Sohan Halwa*. *Chakkis* are also similar to halwa- *Besan ki Chakki* is an all time favorite. The state is also known for the many varieties of laddus (sweet balls) prepared commonly in the households. *Motichur ka Laddu, Besan ka Laddu, Dal ka Laddu and the*

*unique Gaund ka Laddu* eaten mostly in winter months due to the heat it imparts to the system are the state's specialties. A number of dairy products are also effectively used in making desserts. Kheer is a milk-based sweet dish. *Kheer* is cooked in variations such as with the more common rice or with Vermicelli (Seviyan Kheer). *Makhane ka Kheer* and *Jhajharia* are also dairy based recipes cooked only by the natives of the state. *Ghevar* (a specialty of Jaipur) of is probably the most intriguing of sweets prepared in the state. It is a must have on Makar Shankranti, a festival that usually falls around the 14th of January every year. *The Rabri topped Jalebi of Rajasthan is legendary. Malpuas of Pushkar, Dil Jani of Udaipur, Mishri Mawa of Ajmer* have claimed the hearts of international tourists. Firni, Kalakand, Kaju Katli and Mawa Kachori are other all time favourites.

## **REGIONAL SPECIALITIES OF RAJASTHAN IN INDIA**

Each region has its own special food item that is identified with the town or city.

- **Jaipur** in Rajasthan has its specialty of Mishri Mawa, Kalakand and Ghevar. The *Kachchwaaha* family of Jaipur in Rajasthan is the originator of the delicacy called *Safed Maas or white meat*. The preparation is white in colour and is prepared from white mutton. The curry is prepared from cashew nuts, almonds, fresh coconut kernel paste, white pepper and poppy seeds.
- **Bikaner** has its savouries, especially bhujiya, which has accounted for its fame, and the quality of its papads and badi remains unrivalled. The lean mutton of the desert goats of this region too is considered the most favourable.
- In **Bharatpur**, milk sweets, rarely commercially available, occupy a niche by themselves. A Rajasthani delicacy, linked with the monsoon festival of Teej, is called *ghevar*, consisting of round cakes of white flour over which sweetened syrup is poured. Today, variations include lacings with cream and khoya, making it a delightful concoction.
- Muslim food has also occupied a place in the overall cuisine of Rajasthan, not just in pockets such as *Tonk and Loharu*, but also in *Jaipur*, Rajasthan.
- The region of **Mewar or Udaipur** in Rajasthan is believed to have come up the form of barbecue called *Sooley and Dil Jani*.
- The region of **Jodhpur** in Rajasthan is famous for Makhaniya Lassi, Kachoris, hot green masala chilies and Laddoos.
- The region of **Jaisalmer** in Rajasthan is famous for Laddoos
- **Pushkar** is famous for Malpua,
- **Ajmer** in Rajasthan is famous for Sohan Halwa
- **Alwar** is well known for Mawa and Hot jalebies are available in most town and cities of Rajasthan.
- Scarcity of water, fresh green vegetables have all had their effect on the cooking. In the desert belt of **Jaisalmer, Barmer and Bikaner**, cooks use the minimum of water and prefer, instead, to use more milk, buttermilk and clarified butter

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