

More than just a curry house. A brief look at 20 Indian restaurants in Sydney as examples of the changing face of Indian food in Australia.

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I remember a time when there were only half a dozen Indian restaurants in Sydney all with the same menu – Fish Curry, Beef Curry, Eggplant Curry, and Dhal - all of which were the same colour - a dull browny red - and pretty much all were the same taste seemingly from a single curry paste.

Times have changed and Indian restaurants have changed with them. I want to look at the breadth of Indian cuisine available in Australia today. I do this by looking at the online menus of 20 Indian restaurants in Sydney. I recognise that these changes may not be happening in rural or remote areas.

Name

The majority of the restaurants do not use the word 'curry' in their titles.

- Six of them used an Indian name only – Anjappar, Lal Qila, Nilgiri's, Saravana Bhavan, Malabar, Maya da Dhaba.
- Four referenced an Indian dish – Tandoori Hut, Chatkazz, Urban Tadka and Masala Theory.
- Two referenced ingredients – The Spice Room and Seven Spices.
- Three used the name of the head chef/proprietor – Billu's, Ahbi's and Manjit's.
- One referred to a city – Delhi 'O' Delhi.
- One referred to an historic time – Mughul Indian.
- One did away with any overt reference to India or Indian dishes - Don't Tell Aunty.
- One referred to the space in which the restaurant was - The Grand Pavilion.'

Just one used the word curry, albeit in a novel way - Kebabs n Kurrys,

In many instances the word 'curry' has also been dropped from the name of individual dishes, replaced with the style of a dish.

- Tandoori fish tikka
- Dhabe wali makhni dhal
- Sindi pakoras
- Hahi paneer masala
- Kale onion bhaji bites

Description

Here I was interested in how they introduced themselves to the diner and whether they aligned themselves with a particular Indian region cuisine. A few of them did.

- The pioneer in bringing the foods of the famed Chettiars to the people world around.
- The menu is truly Pakistani and harkens back to the Mughlai style of cooking.
- Our commitment to regional cooking sees a combination of tandoori flavours from the north, classics from my native Chennai and seafood dishes from Goa and other coastal towns.

Most of them simply said their dishes were Indian.

- Relish the intricate flavours of our extensive menu, offering over 200 traditional dishes from every corner of India.

- Refined Indian food of today from diverse regions and states.
- Experience the essence of authentic India cuisine.

. They were more likely to ascribe individual dishes to a region

- Andhra Curry Leaf and Chicken
- Baingan Mirchi Salan from the Hyderabad region of India
- Goan Macchi
- Amritsari Fish Fry
- Madras Prawn Vendakai
- Chicken fillets cooked in Punjabi style gravy

Structure of the menu

This was to see whether they stuck to the traditional structure of the Western menu - appetiser/entrée/soup/main/dessert. Most of them did not.

- Soup/appetiser/biryani/ meals and thali/egg items/chicken items/mutton items/sea food/vegetarian/fried rice and noodles/breads and parotta/ dosa zone/desserts/beverages/combo
- Tasting menu/ Crunch and Street food/ Tandoor/ Pots/ Salad Garden / Slurp/ Dessert
- Plates/ Smoky Tandoor & Grill/Curry Classics/Lost Recipes/Sodas/Bread and Rice/Speciality Bread

Dishes

This was to see in which ways they differed from being just curry houses.

Styles of cooking

- Kebab, masala, vindaloo, tandoori, rogan josh, jhalfrezi, korma, bhuna, pulao, biryani, dum, tawa, balti, and thali.

Types of dishes

- Chaat, dosa, uthappam, bhajl, saagwala, haleem, nihari, gosht, puri, biryani, kebabs, pongal, kichadi, vadai, bhatura, bokhla, idli, appam, samosa, roti, naan, pakora, paratha, kulcha, chapati, coconut rice, fried rice, saffron rice, lemon rice, and jeera rice.

Spices

- Ginger, garlic, mustard seeds, green chillies, tamarind, red chillies, cumin, saffron, sesame seeds, anise, sumac, carom seeds, cardamom, cumin, fenugreek black garlic, star anise, jeera, kaffir lime, cassia bark, nigella seeds, and fenugreek.
- Herbs – coriander, fresh curry leaves, methi (fenugreek leaves).

Vegetables

- Okra, potato, onion, chickpeas, peas, lentil, spinach, cauliflower, chilli, tomato, capsicum, zucchini, mushroom, eggplants, cucumber, carrot, beetroot, corn, turnips, water spinach, pumpkin, broccoli, and radish.

Accompaniments

- Raita, rasam, chutney, kachumber, papadums, pickles, sambar, kesari, and mint sauce

Dietary Coding

Restaurants indicated which dishes were best for customers with dietary, health or ethical reasons for not eating certain kind of dishes.

- Bharli Vangi (GF, V). Eggplant, vangi masala, peanut, garlic cream. A lost Maharashtrian gem.
- Kadai Chicken (GF, DF) Med. Spice Chicken dish prepared in Indian Wok using Onion, tomatoes, ginger, garlic and fresh ground spices known as Kadai Masala.
- Seafood Moily (Mild-med) GF Mix of prawn, fish and scallop cooked with ground coconut, onions, tomato, fresh curry leaves and mustard seeds
- Baingan Mirchi Salan (GF, DF, Vegan, Contains Nuts) From the Hyderabad region of India consisting of fried baby Aubergines and green chillies simmered in a spiced curry of coconut, peanut & Sesame Seeds.

Decoding these

- GF Gluten free
- DF Dairy Free
- V is vegetarian or vegan
- NOG meant no onions or garlic
- NF meant nut free

Concluding Comments

I set out to show the breadth of Indian restaurants in Sydney. I have shown how distant they are from times when they were no more than curry houses. They rarely use the word 'curry' in their restaurant names. They structure their meals quite differently to the Western appetisers, entrees, soups, mains, and dessert. They have a range of dishes that don't use the word 'curry'. Also, they use a bigger range of spices specific to a dish than using curry pastes or powders.