



The  
Best-Selling  
Classic Indian  
Cookbook

# MADHUR JAFFREY'S Indian Cookery

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JAFFREY'S  
Indian  
Cookery



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# Contents

Foreword to the 40th anniversary edition 06

Introduction 08

Spices, seasoning & flavourings 12

Techniques 20

Menus 24

Soups, snacks & savouries 26

Meat 48

Poultry & eggs 80

Fish 108

Vegetables 124

Pulses 154

Breads 174

Rice 188

Relishes, chutneys & pickles 212

Sweets 226

Index 236

The whole spices, including whole chillies, used in the dishes in this book are not intended to be eaten. If they cannot easily be removed before serving, leave them to one side of the plate, along with any bones.

## Foreword to the 40th anniversary edition

As I look through this book that I wrote forty years ago, I am surprised to note how little I would change were I writing it today. It is not that Indian eating fashions do not vary over time. They do. Foods come into style and go out again, certain foreign influences are strong at one time, then others take over. Some changes and additions are accepted permanently. But what really sustains India are those reliable, trustworthy, dependable meals that are cooked at home daily. These foods vary from state to state, sometimes from town to town. Indians remember them wherever they are, especially when far from home, as 'their food' and get teary-eyed when a familiar kitchen scent wafts their way. My book is filled with these home-cooked regional dishes and they are timeless.

Indian food in Britain was once known not for any recognisable place of origin or finer points of cookery. It was known for being cheap, hot and a good accompaniment to glasses of beer. It helped that it could be found in restaurants on every local high street. The biggest change after my cookery shows were broadcast was that people who watched a show one evening would cook what they had seen the next day. They had the first edition of this book to help them with the details. It changed the way the British ate and what they ate. It altered forever the way the British thought of Indian food, indeed, of Indians themselves.

Today, everyone seems so much more familiar with Indian food. They will tell you they are making a Gujarati meal, or they cooked a Punjabi dish. They are learning from friends and neighbours. They are using cookery books with home-style recipes to guide them, both mine and the host of others who followed me. All the spices, whose names once seemed unpronounceable, are not only on everyone's tongues but on the shelves of most supermarkets. Fresh herbs and greens are there too. You want fresh green coriander, green chillies or fresh curry leaves? There will be a local supermarket that carries them. Indeed, major spice companies have added to their supermarket spice lists again and again; they make money doing so and satisfy their customers as well.

I write my recipes in great detail as I do not want you, my readers, to ever fail or find any step confusing. I know how a dish should taste and feel it is my obligation to write a recipe in such a way that, when you finish cooking, your dish tastes the same as mine. I am mentioning this as I have added eleven new recipes to this book. I noticed that there were relatively few recipes for pulses, which we North Indians call dal, in the original edition.

dal every single day, sometimes with rice and sometimes with an Indian flatbread. We have learned from our ancestors – and now science has proven their wisdom correct – that the simple combination of dal, a grain and a little yogurt or buttermilk make up a perfect protein, which even the poorest Indian needs to survive decently.

So, I am adding some more dals to this new edition. I never realised that I had not included moong dal in the texture that I first ate it, a soft, flowing form we start eating when we are children and continue to eat when we get old, as it's the easiest dal to digest. Now that I think about it, we started spooning moong dal into my granddaughter's mouth when she was six months old. She just loved it and kept opening her mouth for more like a bird. I thought you should have this recipe, as so many of you are cooking at home for your family. I am sure you want to include your little ones.

I do hope you find it just as easy and exciting to prepare the new recipes as you did those in the earlier book. I have added a hot, sweet and sour dish of chicken cooked with apricots. There are potato-stuffed parathas (I love potatoes in all forms and this is one of my most beloved dishes), a salmon centrepiece grand enough for a festive spread and many more.

Please do not feel that you have to prepare a large, elaborate meal every time you plan to cook Indian food. You can just cook one main dish, but make it fully. Then add, if you like, rice made in a rice cooker and my quick-and-easy spicy cucumber wedges, a form of what we North Indians call *chaat* – hot, sour and spicy street foods – already waiting patiently for you in the pages of this book. That would round out your meal nicely.

Whether you choose to cook an Indian meal from my new recipes, or make the old favourites, or even mix up some of both, I hope you, too, will find that *Indian Cookery* has stood the test of time.

# Introduction

I have always loved to eat well. My mother once informed me that my passion dates back to the hour of my birth, when my grandmother wrote the sacred syllable *Om* ('I am') on my tongue with a finger dipped in fresh honey. I was apparently observed smacking my lips rather loudly.

Starting from that time, food – good food – just appeared miraculously from somewhere at the back of our house in Delhi. It would be preceded by the most tantalising odours – steaming basmati rice, roasting cumin seeds, cinnamon sticks in hot oil – and the sounds of crockery and cutlery on the move. A bearer, turbaned, sashed and barefooted, would announce the meal and soon we would all be sitting around the dinner table, a family of six, engrossed in eating monsoon mushrooms cooked with coriander and turmeric, rahu fish that my brothers had just caught in the Jamuna River and cubes of lamb smothered in a yogurt sauce.

It was at this stage of innocence that I left India for London, to become a student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. My 'digs' were in Brent and consisted of a pleasant room and, through the kindness of my landlords, use of the kitchen.

'Use of the kitchen' was all very well, but exactly how was I going to use it? My visits to our kitchen in Delhi had been brief and intermittent. I could not cook. What was worse, I felt clumsy and ignorant.

An SOS to my mother brought in return a series of reassuring letters, all filled with recipes for my favourite foods. There they were, *qeema matar* (minced meat with peas), *rogan josh* (a red lamb stew), *phool gobi aur aloo ki bhaji* (cauliflower with potatoes)...

Slowly, aided by the correspondence course with my encouraging mother, I did learn to cook, eventually getting cocky enough to invite large groups of friends over for meals of *shahi korma* (royal korma) or *shahjahanī murghi* (Mughlai chicken with almonds and sultanas). Once certain basic principles had been mastered, cooking Indian food had become perfectly accessible.

There is something so very satisfying about Indian cookery, more so when it is fresh and home-cooked. Perhaps it is that unique blending of herbs, spices, seasonings, as well as meat, pulses, vegetables, yogurt dishes and relishes that my ancestors determined centuries ago would titillate our palates. At the same time it preserves our health and the proper chemical

balance of our bodies. This combination of wholesome food and endless flavours and dishes makes Indian cookery one of the greatest in the world.

Indian food is far more varied than the menus of Indian restaurants suggest. One of my fondest memories of school in Delhi is of the lunches that we all brought from our homes, ensconced in multi-tiered tiffin-carriers. My stainless-steel tiffin-carrier used to dangle from the handle of my bicycle as I rode at great speed to school every morning, ribboned pigtailed fluttering behind me. The smells emanating from it sustained me as I dodged exhaust-spewing buses, and later, as I struggled with mind-numbing algebra. When the lunch bell finally set us free, my friends and I would assemble under a shady neem tree if it was summer or on a sunny verandah if it was winter. My mouth would begin to water even before we opened our tiffin-carriers. It so happened that all my friends were of differing faiths and all came, originally, from different regions of the country. Even though we were all Indian, we had hardly any culinary traditions in common. Eating always filled us with a sense of adventure and discovery as we could not often anticipate what the others might bring.

My Punjabi friend was of the Sikh faith. She often brought large, round parathas made with wheat and ghee produced on her family farm. These were sometimes stuffed with tart pomegranate seeds and sometimes with cauliflower. We ate them with a sweet-and-sour, homemade turnip pickle.

Another friend was a Muslim from Uttar Pradesh, known to bring beef cooked with spinach, all deliciously flavoured with chillies, cardamom and cloves. Many of us were Hindus and not supposed to eat beef. So we just pretended not to know what it was. Our fingers would work busily around the tender meat that covered the bones and our cheeks would hollow as we sucked up the spicy marrow from the marrow bones. But we never asked what we were eating. The food was far too good for that. On the other hand, whenever my father went boar-hunting and we cooked that meat at home, I never took it to school. I knew it would offend my Muslim friends.

Another member of our gang was a Jain from Gujarat. Jains are vegetarians, some of them so orthodox as to refrain from eating beetroots and tomatoes because their colour reminds them of blood, or root vegetables because in pulling them out of the earth some innocent insect might have to lose its life. This friend occasionally brought the most delicious pancakes – *pooras* — made out of legumes.

One of us came from Kashmir, India's Northernmost state. As she thrilled us with tales of tobogganing in winter – the rest of us had never seen snow – she would unpack morel mushrooms from Kashmiri forests, cooked with tomatoes and peas, flavoured with asafoetida. She was a Hindu, of course.

Only Kashmiri Hindus cook with asafoetida. And they do not cook with garlic. Kashmiri Muslims cook with garlic and frown upon asafoetida. I found all this much easier to follow than algebra.

We had a South Indian friend too, a Syrian Christian from Kerala. She often brought idlis, slightly sour, steamed rice cakes that we ate with sambar, a pulse and fresh vegetable stew.

I, a Delhi Hindu, tried to dazzle my friends with quail and partridge which my father shot regularly and which our cook prepared with onions, ginger, cinnamon, black pepper and yogurt.

India is such a large country: more than a million square miles of changing topography, divided into thirty-one states and territories. Geography and local produce have played a great part in forming regional culinary traditions. Religious groups within each state have modified these regional cuisines even further to suit their own restrictions. History, too, has had its influences. Goa, for example, on India's West coast, was ruled by the Portuguese for four centuries. Many of Goa's people were converted to Catholicism, some by Saint Francis Xavier himself, and they eventually developed an eating style which included platters of beef roulade – a stuffed roll of beef cooked in garlic-flavoured olive oil – and a dessert of layered pancakes, *bibingka*, made with egg yolks, coconut milk and raw Indian sugar. British colonialists left quite a few dishes in their wake too. There were those *cutlis* (cutlets) that our cook made. He, of course, marinated them in ginger and garlic first. Then there was the strong influence of the Moghuls. They had come to India via Persia in the sixteenth century and introduced the subcontinent to delicate pullaos and meats cooked with yogurt and fried onions.

If there is a common denominator in all Indian foods, it is, perhaps, the imaginative use of spices. Does this mean that Indian food is always spicy? Well, in a sense it does. It always uses spices, sometimes just one spice to cook a potato dish and sometimes up to fifteen spices to make an elaborate meat dish. But it is not always hot. The 'heat' in Indian food comes from hot chillies. Chilli peppers were introduced to Asia in the sixteenth century by the Portuguese who had discovered them in the New World. Our own pungent spices until that time were the more moderate mustard seeds and black peppercorns. Those of you who do not like hot food should just leave out all the chillies – red, green, or cayenne – in my recipes. Your food will still be authentically Indian, superb in flavour and not at all hot.

The spices and seasonings that we do like to use in our food include cumin, coriander, turmeric, black pepper, mustard seeds, fennel seeds, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves. Sometimes we leave the spices whole and fry them,

sometimes we roast the spices and at other times we grind them and mix them with water or vinegar to make a paste. Each of these techniques draws out a completely different flavour from the same spice. This way we can give a great variety to, say, a vegetable such as a potato, not only by methods such as boiling, baking and roasting but by cooking it with whole cumin seeds one time, a combination of ground cumin and roasted fennel seeds another time, and with black pepper a third time. The permutations become endless, as does the possibility of variety in tastes.

Does this mean that you cannot cook Indian food without having a whole lot of spices? I suggest that you start off with buying the specific spices you need to cook a selected dish and then slowly increase your spice 'wardrobe'. It is a bit like being a painter, I suppose. If you have a palette glowing with magenta and cobalt blue and sap green and vermilion, it will give you the confidence – and the choice – to do anything you want. You could use one colour, if you desired, or ten. It is the same with spices. It is nice to know that they are there. Whole spices last a long time. This way, you can cook aubergines with fennel seeds one day and green beans with cumin seeds the next day, if that is what you want.

Once you have mastered the use of Indian spices, you will find yourself not only cooking Indian meals, but also inventing dishes with an Indian flavour and using Indian spices in unexpected ways. A French chef who once observed me cooking now regularly uses ground roasted cumin seeds in his cream of tomato soup. I myself have created an Indian-style dish of pork chipolatas for this book to start you off in this pleasant direction (see page 75).

Since it is the carefully orchestrated use of spices, seasonings and flavourings that gives Indian food its unique character, it might be useful to first examine them singly and remove their mystery.

## Spices, seasoning & flavourings

Many of the spices used in Indian foods can now be found in supermarkets. These include cumin, coriander, turmeric, cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, black pepper, bay leaves, ginger, paprika and cayenne pepper. Others have to be searched out from specialist shops, or Indian or Pakistani grocers. Such grocers can now be found in all major cities and in many small towns as well. It is also, of course, easy to order spices online these days.

Ideally speaking, it is best to buy all dry spices in their whole form. They will stay fresh for long periods if stored in cool, dry, dark places in tightly lidded jars. This way you can grind the spices as you need them. I use an electric coffee-grinder for this purpose, although a pestle and mortar would do. The more freshly ground the spices, the better their flavour. If you can only buy ground spices, buy small quantities and store them, too, in cool, dry, dark places in tightly lidded jars.

When transferring spices from plastic packets to jars, be sure to label them. When buying spices from ethnic grocers, make sure that they are labelled. Many of my cooking students have come to me with unlabelled jars and asked, 'What do I have here?' Even I, who have been cooking now for twenty-five years, cannot tell the difference between ground cumin and ground coriander without tasting or smelling them first.

Here is a list describing the spices, seasonings and flavourings I have used in this book:

### ASAFOETIDA

#### *Heeng*

The source for this smelly resin has traditionally been Afghanistan and Western Kashmir. In its lump form, asafoetida looks rather like the brown rosin my husband uses on the bow of his violin. Its smell is another matter. James Beard, America's foremost food writer, once compared the smell to that of fresh truffles. It is a digestive and is used in very small quantities. (It can even cure horses of indigestion!) A pinch of it is thrown into very hot oil and allowed to fry for a second before other foods are added.

As asafoetida is not very easy to find, I have made its use optional in my recipes. If you wish to purchase it, I suggest that you buy the smallest box available of ground asafoetida. Make sure that the lid sits tightly on the box when you store it.

## CARDAMOM, PODS AND SEEDS

### *Elaichi*

Cardamom pods are whitish or green and have parchment-like skins and lots of round, black, highly aromatic seeds inside. The whitish pods are more easily available in supermarkets. They have been bleached and have less flavour and aroma than the unbleached green ones. For my recipes, use whichever pods you can find easily, though the green ones are better. Many of my recipes call for whole cardamom pods. They are used as a flavouring in both savoury and sweet dishes. When used whole, cardamom pods are not meant to be eaten. We leave them on the side of the plate, with any bones.

When a recipe calls for cardamom seeds, you can either take the seeds out of the pods (a somewhat tedious task, best done while watching television) or else you can buy the seeds from the few Indian and Pakistani grocers who sell them. If my recipe calls for a small amount of ground cardamom seed, just pulverise the seeds in a mortar.

## CAYENNE PEPPER

### *Pisi hui lal mirch*

Made from dried red chillies, this is called red chilli powder by Indian and Pakistani grocers. Most of my recipes have a flexible amount of cayenne pepper in them. It is hard to know how hot people like their food. Use the smaller amount if you want your foods mildly hot and the larger amount if you want it hotter. Cayenne pepper is sold in all supermarkets. I like using Kashmiri chilli powder in its place, as it has lovely colour and flavour.

## CHILLIES, FRESH, HOT, GREEN

### *Hari mirch*

These fresh chillies, 5–10cm/2–4 inches long, green outside and filled with flat, round, white seeds, are sold by Asian grocers, some supermarkets and increasingly in street markets. Besides being rich in vitamins A and C, they give Indian foods a very special flavour. If my recipe calls for them, make at least one good effort to find them. If you are unsuccessful, use a little more cayenne pepper as a substitute.

Green chillies should be stored unwashed and wrapped in newspaper, in a plastic container in the refrigerator. Any chillies that go bad should be thrown away, as they affect the whole batch. They can also be frozen and used while still frozen

Important: Be careful when handling cut green chillies. Refrain from touching your eyes or mouth; wash your hands as soon as possible, or you will 'burn' your skin with the irritant the chillies contain. If you want the green chilli flavour without most of the heat, remove the white seeds.

## CHILLIES, WHOLE, DRIED, HOT, RED

### *Sabut lal mirch*

These chillies, 4–5cm/1½–2 inches long and about 1cm/½ inch wide, are often thrown into hot oil for a few seconds until they puff up and their skin darkens. This fried skin adds its own very special flavour to a host of meats, vegetables and pulses. Handle these chillies carefully, making sure that you wash your hands well before you touch your face. If you want the flavour of the chillies without their heat, make a small opening in them and then shake out and discard their seeds.

These chillies are sold by most Asian grocers and in many supermarkets.

## CINNAMON

### *Dar cheeni*

Buy sticks. We often use them whole in meat and rice dishes. The sticks are used just for their flavour and aroma and are not meant to be eaten. They can be found in all supermarkets.

## CLOVES, WHOLE

### *Long*

We often use whole cloves in our meat and rice dishes for their flavour and aroma. They are not meant to be eaten. (It must be added that we do also suck on whole cloves as a mouth and breath freshener.) Whole cloves are sold by most supermarkets.

## COCONUT, FRESH GRATED

### *Nariyal*

When buying coconuts, make sure that they are crack-free and have no mould on them. Shake them to make sure that they are heavy with liquid. Now hold a coconut in one hand over a sink and hit it around the centre with the claw end of a hammer or with the blunt side of a heavy cleaver. The coconut should crack and break into two halves. (You could, if you like, collect the liquid in a cup. It is not used in cooking, but you may drink it. I do. I consider it my reward for breaking open the coconut in the first place.) Taste a piece of the coconut to make sure it is sweet and not rancid. Prise off the coconut flesh from the hard shell with a knife. If it proves to be too obstinate, it helps to put the coconut halves, cut side up, directly over a low flame, turning them around now and then so they char slightly. The woody shell contracts and releases the kernel.

Now peel off the brown coconut skin with a potato peeler and break the flesh into 2.5cm/1 inch pieces (larger ones if you are grating manually). Wash these coconut pieces and either grate them finely on a hand grater or else put them in an electric blender or food processor. Do not worry about

turning them into pulp in these electric machines. What you will end up with will be very finely 'grated' coconut, perfect for all the Indian dishes that require it.

Grated coconut freezes beautifully and defrosts fast. I grate large quantities when I have time and store it in the freezer. Fresh coconuts are sold by all Asian grocers and widely available in larger supermarkets and greengrocers' shops. All Indian grocers sell frozen grated fresh coconut in thin, flat packs.

#### CORIANDER, FRESH GREEN

*Hara dhania or kothmir*

This is one of India's favourite herbs and is used, just as parsley might be, both as a garnish and for its flavour. The pretty green coriander plant grows 15–20cm/6–8 inches in height. Just the top, leafy section is used, though the stems are sometimes thrown into pulse dishes for their aroma. Its delicate flavour is unique. It is sold in all supermarkets, but it may also be grown at home from coriander seeds.

To store fresh green coriander, put it in its unwashed state, roots and all, into a container filled with water, almost as if you were putting flowers in a vase. The leafy section of the plant should not be in water. Pull a polythene bag over the coriander and container and refrigerate the whole thing. The fresh coriander should last for weeks. Every other day, pick off and discard the yellowing leaves.

#### CORIANDER, SEEDS AND GROUND

*Dhania, sabut and pisa*

These are the round, beige seeds of the coriander plant. They are used a lot in Indian cooking, generally in their ground form. You may buy them, already ground, from supermarkets and Indian and Pakistani grocers. You could also buy the whole seeds and grind them yourself in small quantities in an electric coffee-grinder. I like to put my home-ground coriander seeds through a sieve, though this is not essential.

Ground coriander seeds, if stored for several months, begin to taste a little like sawdust. It is always best to discard them at this stage and start off with a fresh batch.

#### CUMIN, SEEDS AND GROUND

*Zeera, sabut and pisa*

These caraway-like seeds are used very frequently in Indian food, both in their whole and ground forms. They are sold by Indian and Pakistani grocers and by supermarkets. Whole seeds keep their flavour much longer and may be ground very easily in an electric coffee-grinder.

### CUMIN SEEDS, ROASTED

Put 4–5 tablespoons of cumin seeds into a small, heavy frying pan (cast-iron frying pans are best for this) and place the pan over a medium flame. No fat is necessary. Stir the seeds and keep roasting them until they turn a few shades darker. Soon you will be able to recognise the wonderful ‘roasted’ aroma that these seeds emit when they are ready. Store in an airtight container.

### CUMIN SEEDS, ROASTED AND GROUND

Empty freshly roasted seeds quickly on to a sheet of kitchen paper, cool, then grind in an electric coffee-grinder or other spice grinder, or use a pestle and mortar, or put the seeds between two sheets of brown paper and crush with a rolling pin. Store ground roasted cumin in a tightly lidded jar.

### CUMIN SEEDS, BLACK

*Shah zeera or kala zeera*

These fine seeds, darker and more expensive than regular cumin seeds, are sold only by Indian and Pakistani grocers, or you can find them online. They look like caraway seeds but have a gentle flavour. Buy them whole. If you cannot find them, use regular cumin seeds as a substitute.

### FENNEL SEEDS

*Sonf*

These seeds taste and look like anise seeds, only they are larger, plumper and milder. They give meat and vegetables a delicious, liquorice-like flavour. They may be bought from supermarkets and Indian and Pakistani grocers. Indians often serve roasted fennel seeds at the end of a meal as a digestive and mouth freshener.

### GARAM MASALA

This is an aromatic mixture that generally incorporates spices which are supposed to heat the body (the words mean ‘hot spices’), such as large black cardamom, cinnamon, black cumin (also called *shah zeera* or ‘royal cumin’), cloves, black peppercorns and nutmeg. The mixture is used sparingly and is generally put into foods towards the end of their cooking period. It is also used as a garnish, a final aromatic flavouring sprinkled over cooked meats, vegetables and pulses.

Garam masala is not a standardised spice mixture. Apart from the fact that there are many regional variations, I am sure that every North Indian and Pakistani home has its own family recipe. The recipe opposite happens to be one of my favourites. I have substituted seeds from green cardamom pods for the more traditional black ones as I find their taste to be more delicate. Indian and Pakistani grocers and supermarkets do sell ready-made garam

masala which you may certainly resort to in emergencies. However, you will find it quite pallid, as cheaper spices, such as cumin and coriander, are often substituted for the more expensive cardamom and cloves.

It is best to grind garam masala in small quantities so that it stays fresh. My recipe makes about 3 tablespoons.

Place all the ingredients in a clean electric coffee-grinder (or any other spice grinder). Turn the machine on for 30–40 seconds or until the spices are finely ground. Store in a small jar with a tight-fitting lid. Keep away from heat and sunlight.

- 1 tablespoon cardamom seeds
- 5cm/2 inch cinnamon stick
- 1 teaspoon black cumin seeds, or use regular cumin seeds as a substitute
- 1 teaspoon whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- ¼ average-sized nutmeg

## GINGER, DRIED GROUND

### *Sonth*

This is ginger that is dried and powdered, the same that you might use to make gingerbread. It is available in all supermarkets.

## GINGER, FRESH

### *Adrak*

This light brown, knobbly ‘root’ is not a root at all but a rhizome with a refreshing, pungent flavour. Its potato-like skin needs to be peeled away before it can be chopped, sliced, grated or made into a paste. To grate ginger into a pulp, use the finest part of a hand grater, or the second-finest Microplane grater, if you have that. To grind ginger into a paste, chop it coarsely first and then throw it into the container of a food processor or blender. Add just enough water to make as smooth a paste as possible.

Fresh ginger, a very common ingredient in Indian cooking, is sold by supermarkets and all Asian grocers. When buying ginger, look for pieces that are not wrinkled and have a taut skin. If you don’t use ginger often, ‘store’ it by planting it in a somewhat dry, sandy soil. Water it infrequently. Your ginger will not only survive, but will sprout fresh knobs. Whenever you need some, dig it up, break off a knob, then plant the rest again. If you use ginger frequently, store it in a cool, airy basket, along with your onions, potatoes and garlic. You can also store it in the refrigerator.

## MUSTARD OIL

### *Sarson ka tel*

This yellow oil made from mustard seeds is quite pungent when raw and amazingly sweet when heated to a slight haze. It is used in Bengal and Kashmir for cooking vegetables and fish. It is the favourite oil throughout India for pickling. It is available only at Indian and Pakistani grocers and online. If you cannot find it, groundnut oil may be substituted.

## MUSTARD SEEDS, WHOLE BLACK

### *Sarson*

Once you start using these, you will not want to stop. They are round, tiny and not really black but a dark reddish-brown colour. When scattered into hot oil they turn deliciously nutty. If you want to know what they taste like, make the Gujarati carrot salad on page 225, as they are the main seasoning in that dish. Mustard seeds are available at Indian and Pakistani grocers.

## NIGELLA

### *Kalonji*

A small, black, teardrop-shaped onion seed with an appealing, earthy aroma. It is used in vegetable and fish dishes in Bengal. The rest of the country uses it for pickling. Some North Indian breads, such as naans, have it sprinkled on them before baking. It is sold in Indian and Pakistani stores.

## NUTMEG

### *Jaiphāl*

Buy whole nutmegs. They are sold in supermarkets, delicatessens and all Indian and Pakistani stores. If a recipe calls for one-third of a nutmeg, just hit a nutmeg lightly with a hammer. It is very soft and breaks quite easily.

## SAFFRON

### *Zaafraan or kesar*

Saffron threads are the stigma of special crocuses that, in India, grow in the Northern state of Kashmir. Saffron is expensive. It is used in festive dishes both for its saffron colour and its aroma. Yellow food colouring, or a small pinch of turmeric, may be substituted, though purists would disapprove.

To get the most colour and flavour out of saffron, Indians often roast the threads lightly in a heavy cast-iron frying pan and then crumble them into a small amount of hot milk. This milk is then poured into rice and meat dishes as well as desserts.

Saffron is sold in supermarkets, delicatessens and Indian and Pakistani groceries. Powdered saffron is also available in selected shops.

## SALT

Amounts of salt given in recipes can be adjusted to suit individual tastes. A great variety of salts are now available with differing degrees of saltiness, so taste as you go.

## SESAME SEEDS

*Til*

I use the beige, unhulled sesame seeds that are sold in all East and South East Asian grocers. They have a wonderful, nutty flavour, especially after they have been roasted.

## SILVER LEAF

*Vark*

This airy, real silver tissue is used for garnishing sweets as well as festive meat and rice dishes. It is sold only at some Indian and Pakistani grocers, or of course online. Each silver tissue is packed between sheets of paper. Remove the top sheet carefully. Then pick up the next sheet with the *vark* on it and overturn it gently on the food you wish to garnish. Try not to let the *vark* disintegrate. It is edible. Store it in a tightly closed tin, as it can tarnish.

## TOMATOES, GRATING

Many recipes call for grating a tomato. Here's how you do it. Cut off a thin slice from the stem end of the tomato. Using the coarsest side of a box grater, start grating, with your hand flat against the tomato. Keep grating, pushing the tomato towards the grater, until you are left with just the skin. Discard the skin.

## TURMERIC

*Haldi*

This is the spice that makes many Indian foods yellow. Apart from its mild, earthy flavour, it is used mainly because it is a digestive and an antiseptic. Fresh turmeric looks like the baby sister of fresh ginger. They are both rhizomes, though you will usually find only the dried and ground version in supermarkets. Use it carefully, as it stains.

## VEGETABLE OIL

Most of my recipes call, rather generally, for vegetable oil. You could use what is labelled as 'vegetable oil' in the supermarkets, or you could use groundnut oil, corn oil or sunflower oil. All would be quite suitable.

# Techniques

Many Indian cooking techniques are really ways to get spices, seasonings and flavourings to yield as great a variety of tastes and textures as possible. Spices and herbs do not have single, limited tastes. Depending upon how they are used – whole, ground, roasted, fried – they can be coaxied into producing a much wider spectrum than you might imagine. Herein lies the genius of Indian cooking.

It amuses me that techniques used in French ‘nouvelle cuisine’ have been used in India for centuries. We are told that sauces can be made much lighter if they are thickened with ingredients other than flour. Flour is almost never used as a thickener for Indian sauces. Instead, we use – very cleverly, I might add – onions, garlic, ginger, yogurt and tomatoes.

It might be useful, before you start cooking a recipe from this book, to measure and prepare all the ingredients you need and have them ready near the cooker. This is because many Indian dishes require you to cook in one, flowing sweep. Ingredient follows ingredient, often swiftly. Frequently there is no time to stop and hunt for a spice in the back of a cupboard. Something might burn if you do. So organise yourself and read the recipe carefully.

Here are some of the most common techniques:

## CLARIFIED BUTTER

### *Ghee*

Ghee has a rich, nutty taste and a spoonful is often put on top of cooked pulses to enrich them and give a silky smoothness. In India, there used to be a certain status attached to being able to say, ‘We use nothing but pure ghee.’ But today, even those families are coming around to using unsaturated fats. I suggest you buy ghee, ready-made, from Asian grocers. However, to make it yourself, melt 450g/1lb of unsalted butter in a small, heavy pot over a low flame. Let it simmer very gently for 10–30 minutes; the length of time will depend upon the amount of water in the butter. As soon as the white, milky residue turns to golden particles (you have to keep watching), strain the ghee through several layers of muslin. Cool, pour into a clean jar and cover.

## DROPPING SPICES INTO HOT OIL

### *Tarka, baghaar, chhownk*

Oil (or ghee) is heated until extremely hot, but not burning. Then spices, generally whole, or chopped-up garlic and ginger, are added to it. These whole spices straight away swell, brown, pop or otherwise change character.

This seasoned oil, with the spices, is then poured over cooked pulses and vegetables, or else uncooked foods are added to it and sautéed. Those seasonings most commonly used include cumin seeds, black mustard seeds, fennel seeds, whole dried red chillies, cloves, cinnamon sticks, cardamom pods, bay leaves and black peppercorns, as well as chopped-up garlic and ginger. Hot oil transforms them all and gives them a new, more concentrated character.

### GRINDING SPICES

In India, we generally buy spices whole and grind them as we need them. They have much more flavour this way. You probably can already tell the difference between freshly ground black pepper and ground pepper that has been sitting around for a month. The same applies to all spices. In India, the grinding of spices is generally done on heavy grinding stones. In our modern kitchens, we can use an electric coffee-grinder, grinding small quantities so spices do not lose their flavour. If you wipe the grinder carefully after use there will be no ‘aftertaste’ of spices to flavour your coffee beans.

Buying ground spices is perfectly all right as long as you recognise that they will be less potent as time goes on. Before buying spices, consult the preceding chapter to see which you must buy whole and which you may buy already ground.

### ROASTING SPICES

This brings out yet another flavour from the spices. In my home, for example, we always make yogurt relishes with cumin that has been roasted first and then ground. Nothing else will do. Ordinary ground cumin has a different flavour, quite unsuitable for putting into foods that are not going to be cooked. This roasting is best done in a heavy, cast-iron frying pan which can be heated without putting oil or water into it first. Whole spices are put into the pan. The pan is then shaken around until the spices turn a shade or two darker and emit their new ‘roasted’ aroma. You will begin to recognise the look and scent after you have done it a few times.

### MAKING THICK SAUCES

My mother always said that the mark of a good chef was his sauce, which depended not only on a correct balance of ingredients, but the correct frying (*bhuno-ing*) of these ingredients.

As I stated earlier, there is no flour in these Indian sauces. Instead, the ‘body’ of them comes, very frequently, from onions, garlic and ginger. The rich brown colour comes from frying all these ingredients properly.

Very often, we make a paste of one or more of them first. In India, this is done on a grinding stone, but in Western kitchens you can use food processors and blenders, sometimes with the aid of a little water.

Once a paste has been made, it needs to be browned, or the sauce will not have the correct flavour and colour. This is best done in a heavy pot, preferably non-stick, in a generous amount of oil. Remember that extra oil can be spooned off the top once the dish has been cooked.

#### BROWNING SLICED OR CHOPPED ONIONS AND GARLIC

Sometimes a recipe requires that you brown finely sliced or chopped onions. I have noticed that many students in my cookery classes stop halfway, and, when I point out that the onions are not quite done, they say, 'Oh, but if we cook them more, they will burn.' They will not, not if you watch. Start the frying over a medium-high flame and reduce the heat as the onions lose their water and begin to turn brown. They do need to be a rich reddish-brown or your sauce – if that is what they are intended for – will be pale and weak.

The same goes for garlic. There is a misconception that if garlic is allowed to pick up any colour at all, it will turn bitter. Actually, garlic tastes superb if it is chopped and allowed to fry until it turns a medium brown. I often cook courgettes in oil flavoured with browned garlic. Spinach and cauliflower taste good this way too. In India, we say that such dishes are cooked with a garlic *baghaar*. A garlic *baghaar* can, of course, just be the first step in a recipe. More spices would be added later.

#### ADDING YOGURT TO SAUCES

Yogurt adds a creamy texture and delicate tartness to many of our sauces. But yogurt curdles when it is heated. So, when we add it to our browning sauces, we do so just a tablespoon at a time. It is stirred and fried until it is absorbed and 'accepted' by the sauce. Then the next tablespoon is added.

#### PEELING TOMATOES

To peel tomatoes, bring a pot of water to a rolling boil. Gently drop in the tomatoes for fifteen seconds. Drain, rinse and peel. Now chop the tomatoes, saving all their juice for the dish. In India, we rarely deseed tomatoes. Many people do not even bother to peel them, though I feel it improves the texture of a sauce.

### COOKING CHICKEN WITHOUT ITS SKIN

In India, we almost always remove the skin of chicken before we cook it. The spices penetrate the chicken much better and the entire dish is less fatty.

### MARINATING

We often cut deep gashes in large pieces of meat and leave them overnight in a marinade of yogurt and seasonings. The yogurt tenderises the meat while the gashes allow the flavour to penetrate deep inside. After this, meat can be grilled or baked faster than usual.

### BROWNING MEATS

In India, we generally do not brown cubes of meat by themselves, but with the sauce instead. I find this hard to do with British meats because they release far too much water as they cook. Indian meats tend to be very fresh and contain far less water. So to avoid this problem, I brown my meat a few pieces at a time in hot oil and set them aside. Once I have made a sauce, I add the previously browned meat (and all the juices that come out of it) and let them cook.

Other techniques we need for Indian cookery, to do with cooking rice or pulses, I deal with in later chapters.

## Menus

Generally speaking, an Indian meal consists of a meat dish, a vegetable dish, bread and/or rice, a pulse dish, a yogurt relish (or simply plain yogurt) and a fresh chutney or small, relish-like salad. Pickles and preserved chutneys may be added if you have them. Fruit is served at the end of a meal, or sweets on festive occasions. Vegetarians – of whom there are millions in India – increase the number of vegetable and pulse dishes and always serve yogurt in some form.

Within this basic framework, we try to make sure dishes vary in colour, texture and flavour. If meat, for example, has a lot of sauce, we serve a ‘dry’ vegetable with it. If a vegetable is very soft – such as spinach – we eat it with a crunchy relish.

Most Indians like to eat with their hands. It is only the right hand that is used. With it, we break pieces of bread and use pieces to scoop up meat or vegetables. With it, we also form neat morsels out of rice and other dishes. Needless to say, hands must be washed before and after eating. Even the humblest roadside stall would not consider serving food before offering a *lota* (water vessel) of water for washing.

We serve most foods beside each other on our plates. Only wet, flowing dishes are sometimes ladled on the rice, but not on top of all the rice. Some rice is left plain to enable us to eat it with other dishes. Very wet dishes to be eaten with bread are served in small, individual bowls.

This is all very well if you are cooking a whole Indian meal. On the other hand, there is no reason why you cannot serve an Indian vegetable with roast lamb, or Chicken in a butter sauce (see page 86) with French bread and salad.