

Week: 9

Day: 1

Today's objectives:

Prepare a family style dinner with nice presentation.

Practice making samosas and the dough for them

Focus on better sanitation and safety

Crash course on Indian Cuisine and spices.

Indian Cooking Techniques

Indian cooking techniques are based on the facilities they use to cook with 'grilling' or cooking in a tandoor being one of the most popular cooking methods. A tandoor is a large clay or earthenware oven which is kept extremely hot at all times, breads and meats are then lowered into this oven and grilled very quickly at high heats; breads are slapped against the inside wall of the tandoor to cook quickly. India is also famous for eating curries, usually vegetable curries; which are slow cooked and contain a lot of interesting spices which give the ingredients their intense flavour.

Reflections

I was given a dish I wanted to do today (Vegetable Samosas.) But knew it was going to be a difficult job, I am not very good at making dough and the folding technique is very specific from samosas. Today instead of keeping quiet and trying it myself I asked chef for help whenever I was unsure and this helped a great deal. Although I need to focus more on the changes that are made in the lecture at the start of the class, I always write them down but then often fail to implement the changes during cooking!

We lost our most sanitation aware team mate to the other team this week and so I was a little worried that our station was going to be a complete mess! However we have learnt over the quarter to be much better and our station stayed nice and clean throughout the day even without our team mate aiding us.

I'm trying to remember all the little things that chef has taught us to do in class that we haven't been taught or aren't expected to do in our other kitchen classes. This includes: Washing herbs/greens/veg, Keeping kitchen tools in a sanitizing solution, Keeping ingredients on ice or in the fridge if not being used, separating prep stations and keeping them clean.

I didn't get much chance this week to help my team or oversee what they were making on this day as I was a little too focused on my own recipes.

Ingredients used in Indian cuisine

Garam Masala

We used Garam Masala in African cuisine; but it originates from the Indian subcontinent. It is a blended spice which most spice sellers will have an original version on; it usually consists of the base spices that are found in most Indian recipes: Cumin, Cardamon, Cinnamon, pepper, cloves, nutmeg and anything else that the individual wishes to add. This is used in Indian cooking like an additional seasoning that can be added in pinches to most recipes to give an additional kick of spice.

Ghee

Butter that has been clarified twice to bring out a nutty flavour; the type of fat used in different cuisines is very important and in Asian cuisine it is common to use fat with a nutty flavour; if ghee can't be used then peanut oil is a good substitute. Ghee is used in India for more than just culinary purposes and has been a staple of the diet for an extremely long time.

Pineapples

Pineapples, although not native to India have become very popular; they grow well in tropical conditions and are a sweet fruit which pairs well with the spicy food and hot climate of the country. Unlike other Asian countries pineapples are not regularly used for hot 'sweet and sour.' type dishes; instead they are mostly used for desserts, ice creams and drinks.

Spice seeds (Cumin, Fennel, coriander etc)

A lot of Indian recipes involve slowly releasing the flavours from spices over a long time and low cooking heat, because of this it is common to use whole spices instead of dry, ready ground spices like we are used to. Cumin and Fennel seeds are found in most curry recipes and are ground by hand along with other spices and added to curry paste which can then be used for a multitude of other curries. Seeds are much more pungent and they retain their strength for much longer compared to ready ground spices.

Cardamon

Is a very flavourful (and expensive by weight.) spice which is used widely in Indian cooking. This is a spice which is almost never bought ground and instead is purchased inside the little green (or black) pods; which can then be crushed. Luckily cardamon is very strong and only a small amount needs to be used to impart the flavour to a dish. It can also be used to make a nice tea. This spice is native to the Indian subcontinent.

Cloves

Cloves are a great spice native to the Indonesian subcontinent. They are so great because they can be used to add flavour to meats, marinades AND fruits. A very versatile spice that has an aromatic and slightly smoky taste; strong though and can easily overpower a dish.

Cilantro

Although recognised as a Mexican spice; in my experience cilantro is one of the most commonly used fresh herbs in Indian cuisine, as well as being able to use the dry seeds in curry pastes. It has a tart citrusy type flavour. Commonly used in Indian cuisine as garnish the same way we use parsley in the west.

Nigella Seeds

A unique black seed which is used like other spices to flavour curries, vegetables and pulses. They are slightly bitter and can be used in breads and as a garnish.

Chili's

Although Indian food is well known for being spicy they don't actually use a great number of chili's in their recipes, instead the spice is a dry spice which is developed from the method of cooking, slow cooking the dry ground spices together and making them into a paste allow the spices to develop strength and flavour. Often only one or two strong chili's will go into the spiciest curries.

Curry pastes

Although not an ingredient in itself the curry pastes that are made are vital to Indian cuisine; there are 4 fundamental pastes which can be used to create almost all of the other dishes in Indian cuisine. The pastes are then mixed with other ingredients and spices during cooking to create all the other beautiful dishes.

Flatbreads

Flatbreads are the most popular type of bread in India, yeast can be hard to activate and leaven at high elevations and in humid or hot temperatures. It also somewhat requires temperature controlled ovens and environments which would have been hard to find in India's past. Flatbreads are different all across the country with hundreds of different types of breads coming from India; including breads with vegetables or meat inside.

The Dishes:

Chicken Korma



Chicken Korma is a mild cream based curry which should be cooked slowly over time to bring out the maximum flavour; it should have a slightly nutty flavour but not as much as a passanda. The chicken here was prepared nicely but the sauce wasn't very nutty and was quite thin, a curry should have a thick puree thickness sauce for mopping up with bread and rice

Cucumber, Tomato and Onion Katchumber



Didn't get a great picture of this but it's actually the salad on the right and not the yoghurt dish in this recipe; this is a simple salad and some nice refreshment alongside the rest of the spicy dishes. Unfortunately I didn't taste it so can't comment much but one of my teammates who doesn't eat a lot of salad said it was good so I trust them.

Podina Chatni



A green chutney, an odd presentation for a minty, seasoned chutney; this goes really well with the chapatis. When making chutneys it is all about consistency and finding the right balance of flavours. This was a nice chutney and well balanced. Most chutneys and pastes can be made in a pestle and mortar for authenticity but it's much easier to achieve the correct consistency with a food processor.

Palak Paneer



My teammate did a great job making the paneer from scratch in the morning and frying it without overcooking it. The dish was made very well and I love spinach based curries. The flavours blended very well together, another slow cooked curry that needs time for flavours to develop.

Rajmah (Red kidney bean Dal)



I've not had kidney bean dal before but in eating it I realised I think I just like any kind of dal; this was an interesting take because during the cooking process half of the kidney beans are removed and pureed to give the dal its consistency. Well seasoned as the strong kidney bean flavour wasn't overwhelming, I love recipes that are simple and delicious and this is definitely one of them

Mango Chutney



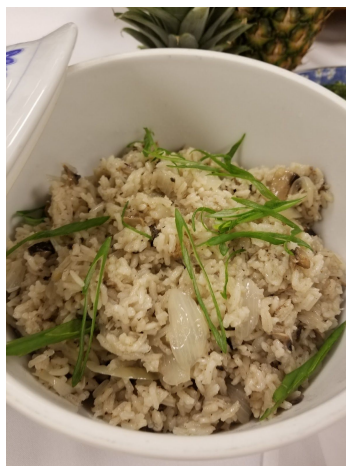
A sweet mango chutney that pairs well with the spicy dishes found in Indian cuisine, like the green chutney the important elements of this dish are the knife cuts and the seasoning. It should be thick like a jam with a sweet but not overpoweringly sweet taste.

Pineapple Smoothie



One of the dishes I made, the beautiful presentation was recommended by chef and is a very traditional way of presenting a fancy smoothie. When blending the ingredients together I made sure to taste the smoothie regularly; At time the pineapple was overwhelming and at other times the creamy buttermilk was overpowering, so I did my best to correct this. After about 3 mins of blending I tried the smoothie and it was VERY chunky, I left it on high for about 5-10 more mins and when I came back the consistency was finally very smooth and I was happy with the flavour, all of it got finished so I assume everyone else was happy too.

Mushroom Rice



Rice again; nice presentation and the team is getting much better at making rice that is cooked correctly; the addition of mushrooms is a great way to add moisture and flavour to a simple dish.

Garam Masala

Garam Masala was used in almost every dish today; I was going to make it but ended up being very busy. My teammate made this at the start of the day instead; it was a little heavy on cinnamon but Garam Masala is a blended spice so I'll take it as his own unique twist on the spice.

Chapatis

Were ok; the chapati dough needs to be fairly firm like bread dough. It is difficult to cook well because it cooks very quickly and parts of it are prone to burning and crisping up. Many of the chapatis that were produced were very crispy, perhaps a little overcooked or the grill wasn't oiled well enough to avoid burning and crisping.

Vegetable Samosas

I made these and required a great deal of help, also once again didn't get a picture of my own dish! They turned out....ok for a first attempt. I got some help making the dough but it ended up being very difficult to work with which made folding the samosas particularly difficult. The dough had been overworked; my italian friend told me to be more gentle when kneading in the future, if his grandma can knead dough properly it definitely doesn't require strength but instead, technique and tenderness.

The filling was seasoned well but the potato could have been diced finer (which would of been easier if I had cut it prior to cooking it instead of afterwards.) And the peas were added to the filling with the other ingredients which can cause them to become mushy. The folding process was awkward but with some assistance I managed to eventually get a hang of the correct method. At least they were cooked to a nice golden brown and all got eaten.