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BIRYANI IS A YUMMY MULTITASK FRAGRANT AND FLAVOURFUL, COLOURED RICE DISH ORIGINATES FROM THE ANCIENT PERSIA

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ABSTRACT

Biryani is a fragrant and flavourful rice dish that originates from the Indian subcontinent. This dish is typically made with long-grain basmati rice, marinated meat (such as chicken, mutton, or fish), and a medley of spices like saffron, cardamom, and cloves. What sets biryani apart is its method of preparation-often cooked in layers, allowing the rice to absorb the essence of the meat and spices. Biryani comes in countless regional variations, each with its unique twist, making it a versatile and cherished meal enjoyed by people around the world. Biryani is a mixed rice dish originating in the contact between delicate Persian pilau and spicy Indian cuisine under the Mughal emperors. It is made with rice, meat, onions, garlic, yoghurt, and spices. There are many varieties of biryani, both in the Indian subcontinent and in countries around the world.

KEYWORDS: Rice, Protein / Veggies, Aromatics & Base, Dairy & Fat, Fresh Herbs, Green and black cardamom, Cloves, Cinnamon sticks, Bay leaves (Tej patta), Star anise, Cumin seeds, Coriander or black cumin (Shahzeera), Black peppercorns, Fennel seeds, Nutmeg, Mace (Javetri), Green and Black Cardamom, Turmeric powder, Kashmiri red chili powder (or standard red chili powder), Garam masala or dedicated Biryani Masala, Salt (to taste), Fried cashews, raisins, or dried sour plums (alu bukhara), Fried Onions (Barista), Fresh Mint and Coriander Leaves, Ghee, Saffron, Rose Water, or Kewra Water.

INTRODUCTION

Biryani originated in ancient Persia as a rice dish called *biryan* (meaning "fried before cooking") and evolved in India during the Mughal Empire by blending Persian *pilau* with local spices and *dum* cooking methods.



Figure-1: Persia map.

Roots and Origins

• **Persian Etymology:** The word comes from *birian* (fried before cooking) and *birinj* (the Persian word for rice).

• **Early Trade & Arrival:** Persian traders, pilgrims, and invaders brought the concept of rice and meat dishes to the Indian subcontinent.

• **Mughal Royal Kitchens:** Under emperors like Akbar in the 16th century, the mild Persian pilau met the pungent, spicy rice dishes of Hindustan to form classic biryani.

• **Alternative Theories:** Some food historians note that ancient South Asian texts like the Pakadarpa and Vedic literature reference similar meat-and-rice dishes called *mamsaudana* long before the Mughal arrival.

Evolution and Regional Styles

As the dish spread across India, different royal courts and regions created distinct versions

• **Awadhi (Lucknowi):** Features a refined, mild style where meat and rice are cooked separately and layered.

• **Hyderabadi:** Famous for Kacchi Biryani, which slow-cooks raw, yogurt-marinated meat and rice together in a sealed pot (dum).

• **Kolkata:** Introduced by **Nawab Wajid Ali Shah**, distinctively featuring boiled potatoes and subtle spices.

• **Malabar / Mopla:** Found in coastal Kerala, utilizing short-grained rice, local spices, and coconut ghee.

On the Indian subcontinent

Biryani is more than just a dish-it's a celebration of flavours, aromas, and culinary traditions. From the rich, spicy layers of Hyderabadi biryani to the mild, fragrant notes of Lucknowi biryani, each variety tells a story of its region and heritage. Here are 26 unique types of biryani that showcase the diversity and richness of this beloved dish. Biryani is not one dish - it is dozens of dishes that share a structure but differ in rice, spice, meat, and technique depending entirely on where they were made. This covers 26 of them.



Figure-2: Biryani.

Biryani is a fragrant and flavourful rice dish that originates from the Indian subcontinent. This dish is typically made with long-grain basmati rice, marinated meat (such as chicken, mutton, or fish), and a medley of spices like saffron, cardamom, and cloves. What sets biryani apart is its method of preparation-often cooked in layers, allowing the rice to absorb the essence of the meat and spices. Biryani comes in countless regional variations, each with its unique twist, making it a versatile and cherished meal enjoyed by people around the world.

1. **Hyderabadi Biryani:** Known for its "Dum" (steam) cooking method, Hyderabadi biryani is a flavourful and aromatic dish where marinated meat and rice are cooked together in a sealed pot. The dish is rich in spices and often garnished with saffron, fried onions, and boiled eggs, making it a sumptuous meal. Try this easy one-pot vegetable biryani or this lamb biryani.
2. **Lucknowi (Awadhi) Biryani:** Originating from Lucknow, this biryani is more delicate, with a focus on aromatic spices rather than heat. The meat and rice are cooked separately and then layered, creating a subtly flavoured dish that's often garnished with saffron and rose water.
3. **Kolkata Biryani:** Influenced by the Awadhi style, Kolkata biryani is lighter on spices and includes boiled potatoes, a unique addition. The dish has a slight sweetness, balanced by the rich flavours of meat and fragrant rice, making it a favourite among those who prefer milder biryanis.



Figure-3: Hyderabadi Biryani, Lucknowi (Awadhi) Biryani and Kolkata Biryani.

4. **Sindhi Biryani:** A robust and spicy dish, Sindhi biryani is known for its bold flavours, with generous amounts of chilies, tomatoes, and yogurt. It's tangy and fiery, often enjoyed with a cooling raita.
5. **Thalassery Biryani:** A specialty from Kerala, Thalassery biryani is lighter and made with short-grain Jeerakasala rice. The dish is mildly spiced, with fragrant notes of ghee, fried onions, and a unique blend of spices. It is often served with chicken or mutton.



Figure-4: Sindhi Biryani, Thalassery Biryani and Donne Biryani.

6. **Donne Biryani:** Donne biryani is a specialty from Karnataka, particularly popular in Bangalore. Served in a leaf bowl called "donne," this biryani is made with jeera samba rice and a green masala paste of coriander and mint. It's a flavourful and aromatic dish, typically enjoyed with spicy raita and often garnished with boiled eggs and fried onions.
7. **Bhatkal Biryani:** Bhatkal Biryani is a specialty from the coastal town of Bhatkal in Karnataka. This biryani is known for its spicy and tangy flavour, achieved through a blend of aromatic spices and a unique masala made with green chilies and coconut. Often cooked with either chicken or mutton, it's typically served with a side of cooling raita, making it a flavourful and satisfying dish that highlights the distinct regional cuisine of coastal Karnataka.
8. **Ambur Biryani:** Hailing from Tamil Nadu, Ambur biryani is known for its simplicity. It uses seeraga samba rice and fewer spices. The dish allows the meat's flavour to shine through and is typically enjoyed with raita and brinjal curry.



Figure-5: Bhatkal Biryani, Ambur Biryani and Dindigul Biryani.

9. **Dindigul Biryani:** Another Tamil Nadu specialty, Dindigul biryani, is tangy and spicy, with the use of yogurt and lemon juice. It's made with seeraga samba rice and freshly ground spices, offering a distinct flavour that sets it apart from other biryanis.
10. **Bombay Biryani:** Popular in Mumbai, Bombay biryani is a mix of sweet, tangy, and spicy flavours, often including potatoes and mutton or chicken. The dish is aromatic, with a hint of kewra water, making it unique and flavourful.
11. **Malabar Biryani:** From Kerala, Malabar biryani is often made with fish or chicken and flavoured with coconut milk. This rich and creamy dish has a mild yet distinct flavour profile, making it an indulgent dish.
12. **Memoni Biryani:** A spicier version of Sindhi biryani, Memoni biryani hails from the Memoni community in Gujarat and Pakistan. It's known for its fiery heat, with green chilies and minimal tomatoes, allowing the natural flavours to stand out.



Figure-6: Bombay Biryani, Malabar Biryani and Memoni Biryani.

13. **Bohri Biryani:** Popular among the Bohra Muslim community, Bohri biryani is a layered dish with a balance of spicy and tangy flavours. It's often garnished with fried onions and fresh herbs, and typically served with a cooling raita.
14. **Kozhikode Biryani:** A Malabar-style biryani from Kerala, Kozhikode biryani is made with fragrant spices like cinnamon and cloves. The biryani is mildly spiced and often prepared with mutton or chicken, offering a rich and satisfying flavour.



Figure-7: Bohri Biryani, Kozhikode Biryani and Beary Biryani.

15. **Beary Biryani**: Originating from the coastal Karnataka region, Beary biryani is mild and less spicy, often made with fish or chicken. The use of coconut adds a unique aroma and taste, making it a light and refreshing dish.
16. **Kalyani Biryani:** Known as the "poor man's Hyderbadi biryani," Kalyani biryani is simpler and more economical. It is typically made with beef and a basic spice mix. Despite its simplicity, it's full of flavour and a hearty dish.
17. **Sri Lankan Biryani:** Sri Lankan biryani is a spicier version of biryani. It is often made with chicken or mutton and includes ingredients like pandan leaves. The biryani is aromatic and flavourful, with a spiciness that's perfect for those who enjoy a more intense dish.
18. **Tahiri Biryani:** Tahiri is a popular vegetarian biryani from Uttar Pradesh, India, made with potatoes, peas, and ghee. It's a rich and buttery dish cooked with fragrant spices, making it a satisfying meal for vegetarians.
19. **Rawther Biryani:** Rawther biryani is a spicier version from the Coimbatore region of Tamil Nadu, often made with mutton and samba rice. It's a robust and flavourful dish, perfect for those who enjoy bold and hearty meals.
20. **Afghani Biryani:** A milder version than Indian and Pakistani biryanis, Afghani biryani often includes dried fruits and nuts. The dish is less spicy and has a subtle sweetness, making it a rich and comforting meal.



Figure-8: Kalyani Biryani, Sri Lankan Biryani and Tahiri Biriyani.

21. **Palakkad Biryani:** Palakkad biryani, from Kerala, is a unique dish with a blend of coconut and mild spices. It is often made with mutton or chicken and is less spicy, but it has a rich coconut flavour that's comforting and delicious.
22. **Degh Ki Biryani:** Degh biryani is known for its large-scale preparation in "degh" (big pots). The biryani is spicy and hearty, often served at weddings and large gatherings, perfect for feeding a crowd.
23. **Sofiyani Biryani:** Sofiyani biryani is a milder and creamier version of traditional biryanis from Hyderabad. Rich in cream, khoya (dried milk), and nut paste, it has a subtle blend of spices and is often referred to as white biryani due to its colour.



Figure-9: Rawther Biryani, Afghani Biryani and Palakkad Biryani.

24. **Mughlai Biryani:** A North Indian specialty, Mughlai biryani is a rich and luxurious dish, often made with chicken or mutton. It includes nuts, dried fruits, and saffron, giving it a royal flavour that's perfect for festive occasions.
25. **Iranian Biryani:** Iranian biryani is a simpler version, often made with lamb and flavoured with saffron and dried fruits. The biryani is less spicy and has a mild sweetness, making it a comforting and aromatic dish.
26. **Jodhpuri Kabuli Biryani:** Jodhpuri Kabuli Biryani is a distinctive vegetarian biryani from Jodhpur, Rajasthan, combining basmati rice with a variety of vegetables and aromatic spices. What sets it apart is the addition of fried bread cubes, which add a unique texture and flavour to the dish.

Main Components

• **Rice:** Extra-long-grain aged basmati rice.
• **Protein / Veggies:** Chicken, mutton/goat, beef, fish, prawns, eggs, or mixed vegetables.
• **Aromatics & Base:** Sliced red or yellow onions, fresh tomatoes, ginger paste, and garlic paste.
• **Dairy & Fat:** Plain yogurt, ghee (clarified butter), and warm milk mixed with saffron threads.
• **Fresh Herbs:** Chopped fresh mint leaves and cilantro (coriander leaves).



Figure-10: Degh Ki Biryani, Sofiyani Biryani and Mughlai Biryani.

Biryani ingredients typically include a base of aged Basmati rice, a primary protein (such as chicken, goat, beef, or eggs), aromatic whole spices, and rich layers of fried onions and herbs.

Whole Spices
• Green and black cardamom
• Cloves
• Cinnamon sticks
• Bay leaves (Tej patta)
• Star anise
• Cumin seeds, Coriander or black cumin (Shahzeera)
• Black peppercorns
• Fennel seeds, Nutmeg and mace (Javetri)
• Green and Black Cardamom: Gives a sweet, floral, and smoky fragrance.

Ground Spices
• Turmeric powder
• Kashmiri red chili powder (or standard red chili powder)
• Garam masala or dedicated Biryani Masala
• Salt (to taste)

Optional Garnishes & Enhancements
• Rose water, kewra water, or mitha attar (sweet essence)
• Fried cashews, raisins, or dried sour plums (alu bukhara)

Aroma Developers
• Fried Onions (Barista): Brings a rich sweetness and deep colour to the layers.
• Fresh Mint and Coriander Leaves: Adds a fresh, vibrant pop of green and herbal flavour.
• Ghee: Gives a rich, buttery depth.
• Saffron, Rose Water, or Kewra Water: Imparts a subtle, exotic floral fragrance and golden colour.

Whole Spices
• Green and black cardamom
• Cloves
• Cinnamon sticks
• Bay leaves (Tej patta)
• Star anise
• Cumin seeds or black cumin (Shahzeera)

There is no single inventor of Biryani. Instead, the dish is the result of centuries of cultural exchange that beautifully merged Persian culinary foundations with South Asian spices and cooking techniques. There is no single inventor of Biryani. Instead, the dish is the result of centuries of cultural exchange that beautifully merged Persian culinary foundations with South Asian spices and cooking techniques.

The Historical Roots
• The Persian Connection: The word biryani comes from the Persian words birinj (meaning rice) and biryan (meaning "fried or roasted before cooking"). Early versions were likely born in ancient Persia as simpler meat-and-rice dishes.
• The Mughal Imperial Kitchens: Most food historians credit the royal courts of the Mughal Empire (specifically during Emperor Akbar's reign) for inventing modern biryani. Royal chefs took the delicately flavoured Persian pilau and combined it with the fiery, aromatic spices of India to create the highly layered dish we know today.
• The Ancient Indian Precursors: Long before the Mughals arrived, ancient Indian texts like the Valmiki Ramayana and the 12th-century cookbook Pakadarpaṇa mentioned mamsaudana—a festive dish of rice cooked together with spiced meat and ghee.

Legend the Story
- **Queen Mumtaz Mahal:** The most popular romantic theory claims that Queen Mumtaz Mahal (the inspiration behind the Taj Mahal) visited the army barracks. Finding the soldiers heavily undernourished, she ordered the royal chefs to create a single, well-balanced meal containing meat, rice, and spices.
- **The Nomad & Warrior Diet:** Another widely accepted theory is that biryani was invented out of necessity as a one-pot army dish for travelling soldiers. They would dig an earthen pit, layer rice and whatever meat was available, seal it, and bury it over hot coals.

Who Invented Specific Regional Biryanis?
While the original creator is lost to time, we do know exactly who "invented" some of its most famous regional sub-varieties.

• **Kolkata Biryani:** Invented by the chefs of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in 1856. When the Nawab was exiled from Lucknow to Kolkata, his kitchen faced strict budget constraints. To make the meat stretch further, his chefs introduced massive, melt-in-your-mouth potatoes and boiled eggs to the recipe, creating a legendary signature style.

• **Hyderabadi & Arcot Biryani:** Perfected when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb appointed Nizams to rule the Deccan region. Their local chefs popularized the Kacchi (raw meat) cooking style, infusing the rice with massive amounts of local saffron and spices.

Biryani gets its rich flavour and smell from a mix of warm whole spices, freshly ground spice blends, fried onions, and aromatic herbs. The main difference is that pulao is a one-pot dish where rice and ingredients are cooked together using the absorption method, while biryani is a complex, layered dish where parboiled rice and a separately cooked meat or vegetable gravy are assembled and slow-cooked (dum) together.

Key Differences

Cooking Method

• **Pulao:** All ingredients (rice, meat/vegetables, and broth or water) go into a single pot and cook together until the liquid is absorbed.

• **Biryani:** Rice and the meat/veggie base are prepared separately. They are then layered inside a sealed pot (handi) and cooked slowly on low heat (dum) so the flavours mix.

Spices and Flavour

• **Pulao:** Uses a milder, simpler blend of whole spices and is lighter on the palate.

• **Biryani:** Features an intense, aromatic mix of spices, saffron, fried onions, and herbs.

Role in a Meal

• **Pulao:** Often acts as a simpler everyday meal or a side dish paired with gravy or dal.

• **Biryani:** Built to be a rich, standalone main course usually served with salan or raita.

Origins

• **Pulao:** Traces its roots back to Central Asia and Persia.

• **Biryani:** Evolved in the Indian subcontinent from Persian cooking techniques (biryan meaning "fried before cooking")

Raita is a yogurt-based condiment commonly found in Indian and South Asian meals. It typically mixes plain Yogurt with diced vegetables, herbs, and a pinch of spices. The result is a smooth, slightly tangy sauce that can be as simple as plain curd or as elaborate as a boondi-laden masterpiece. Raita isn't a side dish you're forced to serve; it's a tradition that grew out of necessity. The hot, aromatic rice dish of biryani can be quite intense, especially when chilies and garam masala are in full swing. A spoonful of cool yogurt softens the heat and makes the whole meal more approachable.

Why Raita Is the Perfect Biryani Companion

- **Temperature balance:** The chilled yogurt tempers the steaming heat of the rice and meat.
- **Flavour contrast:** Tanginess from the yogurt highlights the sweet notes of saffron and raisins often used.
- **Digestive aid:** Probiotic-rich yogurt helps break down the heavy spices, easing digestion.
- **Visual appeal:** The white splash against golden biryani creates a striking plate presentation.

CONCLUSION

Biryani is considered a "rich" food because of its royal origins, heavy use of fats, and complex layers of ingredients.

• Royal Heritage: The dish originated in the royal kitchens of the Persian and Mughal courts, where emperors and nobles demanded lavish, decadent meals prepared with expensive ingredients for grand feasts and celebrations.

• Ghee and Clarified Butter: Traditional biryani uses generous amounts of ghee or oil to cook the meat, coat the rice, and enrich the layers, giving it a heavy, dense, and glossy texture.

• Aromatic and Whole Spices: It is loaded with potent, warming spices like cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, star anise, and bay leaves, which create a deep, heavy flavour profile rather than a light taste.

• Proteins and Marination: Meat (such as mutton, chicken, or fish) is heavily marinated in thick yogurt, cream, or pastes made from nuts, ginger, and garlic before being slow-cooked (dum style) with long-grain Basmati rice.

• Luxury Add-ins: Depending on the region, it often features saffron-infused milk, fried onions (istahta), boiled eggs, or even potatoes and dried fruits/nuts (like cashews and raisins) that add layers of calories and richness.

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