

# THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

## For the love of Biryani

By Diya Kohli

Published: 24th January 2015 06:00 AM



For anyone who has grown up in Kolkata, biryani is the holy grail of food in the city and one that is available in plenitude, around street corners, in nondescript eateries, five-star establishments and historical hole-in-the-wall establishments. The distinguishing mark of this biryani is the gleaming white boiled egg and the delicately spiced potato perched on top of the otherwise Lucknowi style of dum pukht biryani. Having been weaned on this particular meat-rice-egg-potato combination my entire life, in my later migrant wanderings, while I discovered much by way of food, the perfect biryani remained elusive even as I trawled the back alleys of Jama Masjid and Nizammuddin in Old Delhi, the heart of Mosque Road in Bengaluru and Mohammed Ali Road in Mumbai. It is true that my quest has been far from perfect and I have missed the two essential stops on the biryani map. Lucknow and Hyderabad, rival bastions of biryani, still remain like hidden pearls.

I have however eaten countless degs of this dish inspired by the styles propagated by the two cities. From Luknowi dum pukht biryanis by specialist cooks to numerous plates of Hyderabadi biryanis from various establishments called Hyderabad Biryani House serving up a spectrum of the dish ranging from virulent to dull-orange.

The entire point of this prelude is that I stuffed my belly with many artery-clogging plates of biryanis, always to return home disappointed. In all those years that I lived away from home, the only plate of biryani that has sparked my taste memory has been a plate of reheated biryani brought by a friend from the legendary Paradise Hotel in Secunderabad.

Even though this box had spent a few hours on a flight before landing up on my plate, the taste was unmistakable and from the saffron-laced long grains of rice to the spiced gravy from the melt-in-the-mouth pink mutton pieces to the mirch ka salan, this pukki-style biryani was as different from the Kolkata-style one as could be and yet it was a keeper in my taste memory.

Many years later, while doing the usual weekend round of our neighbourhood high street, Indiranagar, I spotted a sign which immediately jogged that half-remembered memory. While I may not be an expert on the original Paradise, my sample portion being too small, I know that it is spoken of with the same reverence that I have for my much-loved Kolkata-based eateries.

While this gleaming avatar of Paradise on CMH Road may not score high on the character and history attached to these legendary joints, it is a smart fuss-free modern format that works for the diner on the go and also serves up a pretty good biryani. And even though it missed the egg-potato accompaniment, it did check many of the other boxes.

Our group arrived in the middle of a chaotic day as the restaurant had just opened and despite being hungry, we were also feeling rather charitable. And even if it took a few long minutes, the food did arrive without too much of a delay, only our lime sodas were forgotten till the very end, but given the biryani in front of me, I could wait. The mutton biryani was flavourful with the trademark pink-tender mutton pieces, a surprising find in a city where the meat has always been a bit too chewy for my liking. Layered with a rich and flavourful gravy, this typical Hyderabadi pukki biryani came with a cooling raita and a mirch ka salan.

Unlike the over-spiced orange rice in most packaged Hyderabadi-style biryani, this dish with individual grains of white, yellow and saffron-coloured rice, although spicy was also a complex combination of flavours.

Apart from this, their chicken biryani, something I usually avoid like the plague due to the tendency of the over-large pieces to dry out, was rather good.

A plate of chicken tikka did not disappoint though it was a tad on the spicy side. Their mutton tikkas were really well-grilled and tender. Comparisons always tend to be scathing in their dismissals and a tad unfair and while I am sure there will be those who will argue about the merit of the original joint vis-a-vis these far-flung outposts, Paradise brings to Bengaluru a flavour of an old city and its Nizami kitchens albeit in a 21st century package.

A meal for two would cost approximately Rs 500

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/bengaluru/For-the-love-of-Biryani/2015/01/24/article2633707.ece>