

Flavors of Litti Chokha

By

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Abstract

An authentic preparation of Bihar called Litti Chokha, is essentially a combination of *Litti* (wheat balls stuffed with Sattu roasted over charcoal) and *chokha* (curry of roasted brinjal, mashed potato and tomato) served with a generous helping of *desi ghee*. What makes this dish simply irresistible is the underlying smoky flavor in the baati and the spicy smokiness from the brinjal in the chokha. This delicacy is now a popular street food in small towns and cities, and over the years it has gained international recognition.

Keywords

Litti, Chokha, Bihar

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Litti chokha, also known as Baati Chokha is a rustic delight from the state of Bihar. Litti, along with chokha is a complete meal that is also very popular in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and the Nepalese provinces of Madhesh and Lumbini (eastern parts). In fact, this dish has gradually become famous now every where across India. Made with whole wheat flour and Sattu, litti is paired with a spicy chokha that features vegetables like potatoes, tomatoes and brinjal. The flavors represent the earthiness of Bihar and one can find it at street stalls and even in fine-dine restaurants.





Image 1: Litti Choka

Litti Chokha is more than just a meal. This humble dish, that originated in Bihar and neighbouring Nepal, has travelled from the kitchens of ancient empire to modern day dining tables around the world. Its roots can be traced back to the ancient Magadh kingdom, where it was offered as a mode of sustenance for soldiers, travellers, and the working class. Being one of India's most significant kingdoms, Magadh under rulers like Chandragupta Maurya, was renowned for its powerful armies and included provisions for portable, durable foods. Litti, made with sattu or roasted gram flour stuffed inside whole wheat dough was ideal for warriors as well as travelers. Its unique style of preparation allowed it to last for days, providing nourishment and energy on long journeys.

Litti was initially prepared by baking it over cow dung cakes which was a traditional and efficient method that imparted a smoky flavor. As time passed, it got combined with chokha which was a mixture of roasted vegetables like eggplant, tomatoes and potatoes mashed with spices. Litti continued to evolve through the centuries. In the mughal period, when culinary preferences shifted towards rich, non-vegetarian dishes, Litti was adapted to suit royal tastes. It was often served with broths, meat gravies and paya in Mughal kitchens. With the arrival of the British, litti also began appearing with curries.

During the revolt of 1857, leaders like Rani Laksmi Bai and Tatya Tope are said to have provided litti chokha to their soldiers. Because of its ease of preparation, long shelf life and ability to be eaten without utensils, it made the perfect field food for troops on the move and

the dish became known as a “food for survival.” It could be baked without any utensils or much water in the jungles and ravines and stayed in eat worthy condition for more than forty eight hours.

In today’s time, Litti chokha is relished in multiple forms across Bihar and beyond. Despite being a simple dish, it has never been confined to any one social class. From farmers in rural Bihar to urban workers and high ranking officials, it has become a favorite for its satisfying taste, affordability and ease of preparation.

Littis are made out of wheat flour dough and cooked on an open fire made out of either wood or coal and is often fuelled with cow dung, a unique method of cooking, providing it with a distinct smoky flavor. Street vendors can be seen preparing Litti in a barbecue style. Litti is often stuffed with ‘sattu’ which is a mixed flout made out of Bengal gram and barley, sometimes with additions of other grains and pulses.

Chokha can be of two types- Aloo (potatoes) chokha and Baingan (Brinjal) chokha, or a mixture of both. ‘Aloo’ or ‘Baingan’ is roasted and mashed. Green chillies, spices and seasoning provide a spicy flavor; however, the critical elevation in taste comes from the preheated ‘Sarson ka tel’ (Mustard oil). The flavor of mustard oil with roasted vegetables gives it a unique flavor. Also, the addition of raw chopped onions and coriander, provide it with an unbeatable texture and freshness. A generous amount of ‘Ghee’ (Clarified Butter) is poured atop the Littis, which makes it soft and rich in flavors.

The key to a great Litti Chokha is the balance of flavors and textures. The crispy Litti, with its spicy, tangy stuffing, complements the smooth, flavorful chokha. The dish is a perfect example of how simple ingredients can come together to create a culinary masterpiece.

Conclusion

Litti Chokha is more than just a culinary delight; it is a symbol of Bhojpuri Cuisine. It reflects the simplicity and earthiness of rural landscape. The dish, that originated centuries ago as a staple food in the court of Magadha, is now a staple at traditional festivals, gathering, and meals, representing the essence of local hospitality and tradition. It’s become

popular of late thanks to the Bihari migrant workers who have carried the dish with them to other states and it's entered restaurant and other menus. Not only does Litti Chokha offer rustic flavors, but is also considered nutritious, offering a balanced combination of carbohydrates, proteins, fats and fibres. The use of whole grains, legumes and vegetables makes it a wholesome meal.

Reference

- Litti Chokha Image from Wikipedia

About the Author

Dr. Gitika Verma is an Endodontist by profession who loves to fiddle with her imagination. Penning stories on the lives of women interests her a lot. Through her writings she wants to create awareness on women related issues and break gender taboos and stereotypes. A mother of two, she's also a fitness enthusiast and has run several marathons all over India.

