

Excerpt: The Lucknow Cookbook by Chand Sur and Sunita Kohli

The Lucknow Cookbook presents that city's culinary expression of its Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb. This edited excerpt includes some delicious sweet dish recipes from the 'meetha' section

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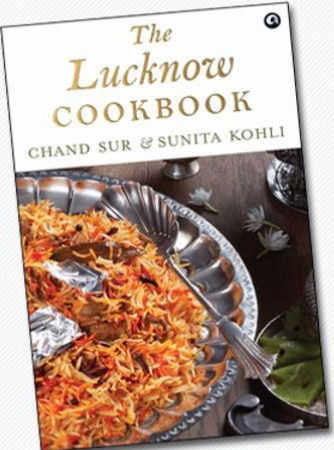
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Chand Sur and Sunita Kohli
Hindustan Times



Phirni, rabarhi and aam malai. (Jasmer Singh)



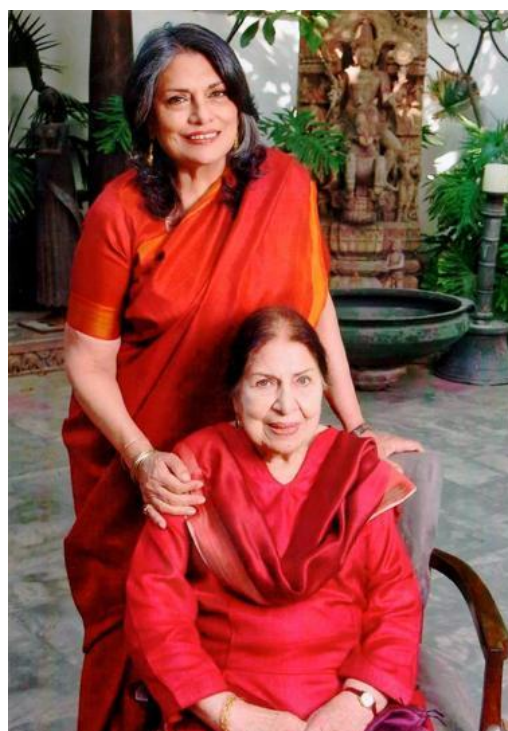
“ A celebration of the *tehzeeb* of Lucknow and its *nazaakat* (elegance), this book is a portrait of the city and its storied history. ”

The Lucknow Cookbook
Chand Sur and Sunita Kohli
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...This city of Lucknow, the ‘capital of India’s most populous state, Uttar Pradesh, which extends along the banks of the river Gomti was once the centre of a distinctive and highly sophisticated society’, says Rosie Llewellyn-Jones. It was here that a unique composite culture, known as Ganga-Jamuni *tehzeeb*, which is syncretic and genuinely embraces both Hindu and Muslim traditions, was born... My mother (Chand Sur), when she first arrived in Lucknow, had never really cooked before, as she had spent most of her life in a boarding school in Mussoorie. But she had watched her mother cook during their holidays in Balochistan, or wherever else my grandfather was posted across the North West Frontier regions. Her mother was a superb cook. Once my parents were well settled in Lucknow, my father arranged for the head chef from Government House to come twice a week to teach my mother. That was really the beginning of my mother’s passionate involvement with cooking. Her cooking style has always been simple and she favours nutritious food and ensured that she uses authentic and natural ingredients. Her dishes are well-presented...This book of recipes is all about the good food that we grew up with...

My mother is a skilled enough cook to invent dishes such as her simple but delightful Jalebi Pudding. She learnt recipes from her friends as also from books and magazines but, recipes received or read, prompt her to create new dishes that are an interpretation of her personality and a reflection of her taste... My mother is now in her nineties. I, too, am in the autumn of my life. To quote Attia Hosain, ‘the strength of my roots is strong; it also causes pain, because it makes one a “stranger” everywhere in the deeper area of one’s mind and spirit, except where one was born and brought up’. For me, that is Lucknow.



Authors Chand Sur(seated) and Sunita Kohli (Courtesy the publisher)

MEETHA

When it comes to meetha, Lucknowi preparations perhaps outshine those from many other regions in the country in terms of taste and delicacy.

A famous and unique Lucknow speciality is Nimish, a beautiful and delicate frothy dessert which can be made only during the cold winter months. The basic preparation of Nimish is when milk is poured into large flat pans and left in the open before dawn. When the early morning dew falls on the milk, it creates a froth which is as light as air. This is continuously collected and later mixed in with cream and other condiments. It is a laborious and painstaking process. A version of Nimish which can be made at home is included in this cookbook as this meetha is a signature dessert of Lucknow. The Nimish of Lucknow is very different from the Daulat ki Chaat available in Delhi.

Muzaafar is a sweet delicacy made out of fine vermicelli. This particular recipe was given to me by my school friend Nilofer Ali, née Qureshi. In school, Nilofer was a champion sportswoman who had only wielded a bat and never a *karhchi* (ladle), as she had never been inside a kitchen. Now she is a consummate cook.

Sheer Korma or Khurma is derived from *sheer* (milk) and *khurma* (dates) combined with vermicelli and dry fruit. It is a mouthwatering and celebrated dessert during Ramadan and Eid.

Shahi Tukra means ‘royal pieces’ of bread. According to legend, this *baadshahi* dessert was invented by the old *khansamas* who disliked throwing away leftover or day-old bread. So, instead, they made the best use of it by converting it into a royal dessert. The bread is deepfried in ghee and then soaked in sweetened creamy milk, flavoured with saffron and pistachios and generously decorated with gold and silver leaves (*varq*). It was so popular among the Mughals that they enjoyed this dessert even for breakfast during the month of Ramadan. The Lucknow nobility followed suit.

Other favourite meethas of Lucknow are Badaam ki Kheer, a sweet creamy dessert made with pounded almonds and rice. Rabarhi is a popular milk pudding garnished with pistachios that tastes delicious with jalebis. Phirni is a simple rice pudding prepared in almost every house.



Chocolate Mayonnaise Cake with Fudge Frosting, Basic Sponge Cake (Jasmer Singh)

Halwa or halva, a word derived from Arabic, means 'sweet or sweetness', and is a grain or lentil-based dessert made with ghee and sugar. It was introduced to Indians through the trade route from the Middle East. In Lucknow, halwas were made with various combinations of lentil, flour, semolina, fresh fruit, carrots, etc. The cheaply available *chana ki dal* (chickpea lentil) was roasted and ground to flour to make the perfect Chane ki Dal ka Halwa, a rich dessert.

My friend Zakia Zaheer makes, perhaps, the best Kali Gajar (black carrot) ka Halwa. She willingly shared the recipe of this seasonal and favourite dessert, which otherwise can only be bought from the Chowk in Lucknow.

My mother's meetha recipes like Steamed Yoghurt, which is blended yoghurt combined with condensed milk, is similar in taste to a delicious cheesecake. Her Aam Malai, made with the purée of luscious ripe mangoes, is very simple and loved by everyone.

The kulfi made in our house is, perhaps, the best home-made kulfi. This recipe was devised by my husband, Rome, and is always available in our refrigerator, be it summer or winter. This simple recipe is light, made without khoya and served without faluda.

NIMISH (LUCKNOW SOUFFLÉ)

SERVES: 4

PREPARATION TIME: 2–2½ HOURS

INGREDIENTS Full-cream milk 8 cups, unboiled cream 2 cups, cream of tartar 1 tsp, castor sugar 1 cup, gulab jal (rose water) 1 tsp, pista (pistachios) 2 tbs, finely sliced

METHOD

Combine the milk, cream and the cream of tartar in a large bowl and refrigerate overnight.

Next morning stir in 4 teaspoons of castor sugar and 1 teaspoon of rose water and whisk the mixture, using a rotary or electric beater at a high speed. Using a large tea strainer, collect the foam that forms and transfer it to a large tray. Keep the tray tilted so that the foam stays on one side while the milk collects on the lower side.

When the tray is fairly full, spoon the foam into small glass ramekins, sprinkling a little castor sugar between each layer and on top of it. The foam will condense a little during this operation. What looks like four bowlfuls in the tray will make only two bowls.

Pour the milk collected in the tray back into the bowl and continue beating and collecting the foam until all the milk is finished. This whole process will take approximately 2 to 2½ hours. Sprinkle pistachios on top of each bowl of foam. Refrigerate until you serve.

SHAHI TUKRA (INDIAN BREAD PUDDING)

SERVES: 8

PREPARATION TIME: 15 MINUTES

COOKING TIME: 15 MINUTES

INGREDIENTS Bread loaf (one day old) 12–16 slices, crusts removed, milk 2 cups,

khoya (whole milk fudge) 1 cup, crushed sugar 1 cup, water ½ cup, desi ghee 1 cup, gulab jal (rose water) 4–5 drops, badaam (almond) paste 1 tbsp, kishmish (raisins) 10 raisins, soaked pista (pistachios) ¼ cup, slivered Badaam (almonds) ¼ cup, slivered kesar (saffron) ½ tsp (liquefied) and a pinch for garnishing, *chandi ka varq* (silver leaf) for garnishing

METHOD

Cut the slices of bread neatly into triangular or rectangular pieces. Fry them in ghee on a low flame to a golden colour. Coat them with the almond paste. Mix the sugar and water to make sugar syrup of a single thread consistency. Keep it on a low flame. Add the saffron and mix well. Dip each slice of bread into the hot syrup, remove and keep on a tray. Reduce the milk to half by boiling it. Add the crushed khoya and mix it in well. On a flat pan, spread the bread slices in a single layer. Pour half the milk mixture over them. Then sprinkle the nuts. Pour the remaining milk mixture and sugar syrup over this and cook the slices until almost all the liquid is absorbed. Take it off the flame and add the pinch of saffron and essence (rose water) over it. Garnish with the slivered almonds, pistachios and silver leaf (*chandi ka varq*).

AAM MALAI (MANGO CREAM DESSERT)

SERVES: 8

PREPARATION TIME: 1 HOUR

INGREDIENTS Mango purée 6 well-ripened mangoes (aamras colour), heavy cream ¾ cup and 1 tbsp sugar, 2 tbsp gelatin 1½ tsp powdered or 1½ envelopes unflavoured

METHOD

To the mango purée, add the cream and sugar and mix well. Prepare the gelatin by dissolving it in half a cup of boiling water, stirring continuously until it is fully dissolved. Pour the gelatin into the mango mixture and whisk it briskly.

Transfer the mixture into a serving bowl, swirl a tablespoon of cream over the top and refrigerate for 3 to 4 hours, until the mango cream is set. Serve chilled. This can also be set and served in individual glass bowls.



Jalebi Pudding and Stewed Guava with Cream. (Jasmer Singh)