

## Integrating Healthy Spice from Pakistani/Hindi to Iranian Cuisine

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### Letter to the Editor

**Coming from the Pakistani background and being extremely fond of Iranian foods, this letter comes to introduce a healthy integration of a herb commonly used in Pakistani dishes into traditional Iranian cuisine:** *Laurel nobilis*, also known as *bay leaves* in common English, *Larus* in Persian and *Tej pata* in Hindi/Urdu, and registered in the *Makhzan al-Adwiya* [<sup>i</sup>] (the so called, Traditional Persian Medicine (TPM) Drug Pharmacopeia), as *Gaar*.

It is always a common question from Iranians to Pakistanis that how can they digest such heavily spiced foods, all assembled in one food item, without feeling the sense of heaviness after eating food. Although, one of basic component of the answer is that Pakistanis are adapted to such rich foods, but there is actually another reasonable answer to it as well. Our seniors, from whom these recipes are inherited, always used some spices or ingredients, to counter or neutralize the unwanted effects of other heavy spices and ingredients, yet at the same time maintaining the taste quality. This is quite similar to the concept of using *Muslih* (neutralizer) in TPM [<sup>ii</sup>]. One of famous Pakistani dish is Biryani Rice [<sup>iii</sup>], that is prepared by making meat curry, using various spices especially extract of bay leaves and then topped up with boiled rice in layers of curry and rice. Comparing the method with Iranian dishes, it is quite similar to *Tah chin* [<sup>iv</sup>] made with shredded chicken and regular spices and vegetables and sometimes tomato paste, topped up by boiled rice in layers. There is a special layer of thick cooked rice soaked in saffron, egg yolks and curd at the bottom. Bay leaves which are of warm and dry temperament of second degree according to TPM, and comprises of general characteristics such as, Mohalil (Analyser of dense particles), Muqawi (Fortifying), Mufarih (bringing happiness), Muddir (Diuretic) and other organ specific characteristics especially for lungs, uterus and bladder [<sup>v</sup>] serves as best herb to neutralize *Ghaleez* or difficult-to-digest food such as Biryani Rice. The quality of bay leaves when used as its extract acting as a Mohalil, functions to disintegrate the indigestible or difficult to digest food particles into small pieces. This action is attributed to its warm temperament that uses its heat to make this process happen. Once broken, these particles are easier to be excreted and hence prevent the harmful effects of indigestible or difficult to digest food from the body.

These particles if not properly handled by body, either due to weak inherent digestive power or due to accumulation in excess can lead to various ailments in the body, such as increased levels of cholesterol [<sup>vi</sup>] and triglycerides, increased chances of fat accumulation in liver [<sup>vii</sup>] or atherosclerosis of blood vessels [<sup>viii</sup>]. These undigested food particles if get deposited in the body joints may also lead to autoimmune related arthritis [<sup>ix</sup>]. Although bay leaves are not considered as routine edible spice because of being hot and dry of second degree, and is a medicinal food (*dawai-gazai*), instead of being absolute food (*gazai mutlaq*) or food medicine (*gazai*

dawai), but since it is used in very low amount (almost 1.5 grams), as compared to its medicinal dose (2.25 grams), it does not pose any harm when used once in a while. On the Iranian counterpart, *Tehchin* is also a difficult to digest food, because of being cooked with a thick bottom layer of hard cooked rice soaked in egg yolks, saffron and curd called as *Scorched Rice or tehdegh* [<sup>x</sup>], it might be a smart idea to add bay leaves' extract in earlier stages of its cooking process, in order to make it easier on the digestive process.

As the world is becoming more and more closer due to social media, and wide interactions among different cultures is taking place around the globe, integrating helpful tactics among various cuisines, based on scientific approval, might serve as a healthier future option!

## References

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<sup>iii</sup> Biryani - Wikipedia, [www.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/biryani](http://www.https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/biryani).

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<sup>x</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorched\\_rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scorched_rice).