

COOKERY

Indian Cookery

Pantry and spice fundamentals, tempering, a proper bhuna curry base, full curry assembly, dal, yogurt marination and dry-heat cooking, basmati rice, and unleavened flatbread — closing with a capstone assembling a full thali, several small dishes served together on one plate.

10 Chapters

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CHAPTER 1: FOUNDATIONS & THE INDIAN PANTRY

Indian Cookery

Chapter 1 · Foundations & the Indian Pantry

Indian cooking's real backbone is spice, not a stock or a sauce base — the same handful of spices, used with real technique and timing, produce a genuinely wide range of different dishes. This chapter is the no-cooking foundation: the pantry, and the equipment later chapters actually lean on.

Whole vs. Ground Spices

Whole spices — cumin seeds, mustard seeds, cardamom pods, cinnamon sticks, cloves, bay leaves (tej patta) — keep their essential oils locked inside until they're cracked or heated, which lets them stay genuinely potent in storage for a long time. Ground spices — turmeric, chili powder, ground coriander — expose far more surface area to air the moment they're milled, and lose real aroma and potency noticeably faster.

BUY WHOLE WHERE YOU REASONABLY CAN

A jar of pre-ground spice that's been open for months is a genuinely different, weaker ingredient than the same spice freshly ground. Where a recipe allows it, buying whole and grinding just before use (Chapter 2) makes a real, tasteable difference.

Key Spices at a Glance

SPICE	FORM	REAL CHARACTER
Cumin	Whole seed or ground	Earthy, warm — one of the most commonly used spices in this course
Coriander	Whole seed or ground	Citrusy, slightly sweet
Turmeric	Almost always ground	Earthy, bitter in excess — used for colour as much as flavour

SPICE	FORM	REAL CHARACTER
Mustard seed	Whole	Sharp and nutty once popped in hot oil
Cardamom (green/black)	Whole pod	Green: floral, sweet. Black: smoky, more assertive
Cinnamon, cloves	Whole	Warm, aromatic — often used together with cardamom
Red chili powder / Kashmiri chili	Ground	Kashmiri chili is milder and prized mainly for its deep red colour
Asafoetida (hing)	Ground resin	Sharp and unpleasant raw, mellows into a savoury, umami-like background note once cooked in hot oil

Asafoetida is worth calling out specifically — used in genuinely tiny amounts, it's a real, distinct ingredient with no close substitute, and it's traditionally used as a background flavour note in dishes that skip garlic and onion.

Garam Masala: A Blend, Added Late

Garam masala isn't a single spice — it's a blend (commonly cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, cumin, coriander, and black pepper, though real recipes vary genuinely by region and family). It's typically stirred in **toward the end** of cooking, not at the start.

A DELIBERATE CONTRAST WITH CHAPTER 3'S OWN WHOLE SPICES

Whole spices bloomed early in hot oil (Chapter 3) are meant to release their oils slowly into a dish over real cooking time. Garam masala's own more delicate top notes would simply cook away over a long simmer — added late, they stay bright and aromatic instead.

Ghee

Ghee is clarified butter, taken a real step further — the milk solids are cooked slowly until they lightly toast before being strained out, giving ghee a genuinely nutty, toasted flavour that a plain clarified butter doesn't have. Like French Cookery's own clarified butter, it has a much higher smoke point than whole butter, but ghee's own flavour is a real, distinct ingredient in its own right, not just "butter without the milk solids."

Lentils (Dal)

LENTIL	REAL CHARACTER
Masoor (red lentil)	Cooks fast, breaks down into a soft, thick dal
Toor / arhar (yellow pigeon pea)	The classic base for a basic everyday dal
Chana dal (split chickpea)	Holds its shape more than masoor or toor
Urad dal (black gram)	Used in some dals and also in certain batters and breads

Essential Equipment

GENUINELY ESSENTIAL	NICE TO HAVE, NOT URGENT	SKIP FOR NOW
- A tava (a flat or slightly concave griddle, essential for Chapter 9's flatbread) - A kadhai (a deep, wok-shaped pan — visually similar to a Chinese wok, but used here mostly for deep-frying and slow-cooked curries rather than fast high-heat tossing) - A pressure cooker (genuinely important for Chapter 6's dal, and for	- A spice grinder, for freshly grinding whole spices (Chapter 2) - A small tadka pan, for the finishing pour technique (Chapter 3)	A tandoor — an oven broiler stands in well enough (Chapter 7)

tenderizing tougher cuts quickly)

Kitchen Practice

No cooking yet — this chapter's practice is about stocking, tasting, and one small comparison.

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Audit your own pantry against this chapter's own list. Check off what you already have, and note which missing items are needed soonest — cumin, turmeric, and coriander for the earliest chapters.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Crack open a few whole cumin seeds and smell them, then smell a jar of pre-ground cumin that's been open for a while. Note the real difference in aroma strength between the two.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Taste a small amount of ghee plain, at room temperature, then taste plain melted butter the same way. Note the real, nutty flavour difference.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — THE INDIAN PANTRY

- Whole spices stay potent far longer in storage than ground ones — buy whole where you can
- Garam masala is a blend, typically added late so its delicate top notes don't cook away
- Ghee has a real, nutty flavour of its own — not just butter with the milk solids removed

- Lentils: masoor breaks down fast, toor is the everyday base, chana dal holds its shape, urad dal shows up in both dals and batters
- Equipment: a tava, a kadhai, and a pressure cooker

Next — Chapter 2: Roasting & Grinding Spices

Dry-roasting whole spices to develop real aroma before grinding, and building wet masala pastes.

CHAPTER 2: ROASTING & GRINDING SPICES

Indian Cookery

Chapter 2 · Roasting & Grinding Spices

Turning whole spices into something you actually cook with is a real, distinct technique — not just a grinder and a jar. Roasting first changes the flavour genuinely, not just the texture.

Why Roast Before Grinding

Spices ground raw, straight from whole, taste sharper and sometimes genuinely bitter or "raw." Dry-roasting first develops deeper, rounder, nuttier flavour compounds on the spice's own surface — a real chemical change, related in spirit to the Maillard browning behind a seared crust or a toasted nut, not just a difference in how warm the spice feels.

Dry-Roasting Technique

1 Use a dry pan, no oil

Heat a pan over medium-low heat with nothing in it — this is a genuinely dry roast, not a sauté.

2 Add the spices and keep them moving

Add the whole spices and shake or stir constantly, keeping every seed and pod moving so nothing sits still against the hot metal.

3 Stop the moment they turn fragrant

Pull them off the heat as soon as they smell genuinely toasted and look a shade darker — this happens faster than it looks like it should.

ANOTHER NARROW WINDOW, LIKE GARLIC AND CARAMELIZED SUGAR

Roasted spices can turn from perfectly fragrant to genuinely bitter and burnt in a matter of seconds — the same narrow margin this whole Cookery Subject keeps returning to, whether it's garlic in a hot wok or sugar caramelizing for a braise. Constant motion and close attention are what keep you on the right side of that line.

Cool Completely Before Grinding

Let roasted spices cool fully before grinding them. Grinding while still warm releases oils unevenly, producing a clumpy, paste-like mass rather than a clean, dry powder — and can gum up an electric grinder's own blades in the process.

Grinding: Mortar and Pestle, or a Spice Grinder

TOOL	BEST FOR
Mortar and pestle	Small batches, more direct control over the final texture
Electric spice grinder	Larger batches, faster, more consistent fineness

Wet Masala Pastes

A genuinely different preparation from a dry ground spice powder — spices (raw or lightly roasted) ground together with a little liquid (water, vinegar, or oil) and other aromatics like ginger, garlic, or onion into a smooth, wet paste. Wet pastes coat meat evenly for a marinade, or build a thick curry base quickly, in a way a dry powder alone can't.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Dry-roast a small mix of whole cumin and coriander seeds properly, stopping the moment they turn fragrant, then let them cool and grind them. Smell and taste the result.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Roast a second batch of the same spices, deliberately leaving them on the heat well past the fragrant point until they visibly darken further. Grind and taste this batch against the first.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Grind a simple wet masala paste from ginger, garlic, and a fresh chili with a small splash of water. Taste it directly against a dry ground spice mix.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — ROASTING & GRINDING SPICES

- Dry-roasting develops deeper, rounder flavour — raw-ground spices taste sharper, sometimes bitter
- Dry pan, constant motion, stop the moment it smells fragrant — the window to burnt is narrow
- Cool completely before grinding, or the result clumps into a paste instead of a clean powder
- Mortar and pestle for small batches and control; an electric grinder for speed and consistency
- Wet masala pastes (spices + liquid + aromatics) coat a marinade or build a curry base quickly

Next — Chapter 3: Tempering (Tadka/Chaunk): The Defining Technique

Blooming whole spices in hot ghee, used as a base start or a finishing pour.

CHAPTER 3: TEMPERING (TADKA/CHAUNK): THE DEFINING TECHNIQUE

Indian Cookery

Chapter 3 · Tempering (Tadka/Chaunk): The Defining Technique

If this course has one single most important skill, it's this one. Tempering — tadka or chaunk — blooms whole spices in hot ghee or oil, releasing their oils directly into the fat itself. It shows up constantly, in two genuinely different roles.

Two Roles: Base, or Finish

ROLE	WHEN	HOW
Base tadka	The very start of cooking	Bloomed directly in the same pot the whole dish will be built in, before onions or other aromatics go in
Finishing tadka	Right at the end, separately	Bloomed in a small, separate pan, then poured directly over an already-finished dish — the classic dal finish (Chapter 6)

A GENUINELY SIMILAR MOVE TO CHINESE COOKERY'S OWN HOT-OIL FINISH

A finishing tadka poured over a finished dal shares real, direct kinship with Chinese Cookery's own screaming-hot-oil finish poured over a steamed fish — hot, aromatic-infused oil, added at the very last moment, right in front of the diner. The specific spices and the dish differ genuinely; the underlying mechanism doesn't.

The Technique

1 Heat ghee or oil until genuinely hot

A reliable test: drop in a single mustard seed — it should sizzle and pop almost immediately.

2 Add spices in order of heat tolerance

Hardier whole spices — mustard seeds, cumin — go in first, since they need more time and heat to release their oils and toast properly. More delicate additions go in later.

3 Add curry leaves and other delicate aromatics near the end

Curry leaves and asafoetida go in only in the final few seconds — they crackle and turn fragrant almost instantly, and burn just as fast.

4 Move immediately to the next step

For a base tadka, add onions or other aromatics right away. For a finishing tadka, pour the whole thing — oil and spices together — directly over the finished dish without delay.

THE SAME NARROW WINDOW AS CHAPTER 2'S ROASTING

Tempering spices in hot oil can go from perfectly bloomed to genuinely burnt in seconds — an even more unforgiving version of Chapter 2's own dry-roasting warning, since oil this hot cooks faster than a dry pan.

Real Sensory Cues

Mustard seeds give a genuine, reliable audible signal — a real crackle and pop the moment they hit oil hot enough. Curry leaves turn visibly translucent and release their aroma almost the instant they touch the oil. Both are real, trustworthy doneness cues worth learning to listen and watch for, rather than counting seconds on a clock.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a base tadka in a pot — mustard seeds, then cumin, then curry leaves near the end — listening and watching for the pop and crackle at each stage.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook a simple pot of plain lentils or rice, then make a separate finishing tadka and pour it over the top just before serving. Taste before and after the pour.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Deliberately leave a tadka in the hot oil well past the point it's fully bloomed, until it visibly burns. Taste it against a properly timed batch.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — TEMPERING (TADKA/CHAUNK)

- Two roles: a base tadka started in the cooking pot, or a finishing tadka poured over a finished dish
- Test oil heat with one mustard seed — it should pop almost immediately
- Add spices in order of heat tolerance — hardier ones first, curry leaves and hing near the very end
- A narrower burn margin than Chapter 2's own roasting, since hot oil cooks even faster than a dry pan
- Mustard seeds' own pop and curry leaves' own crackle are real, trustworthy doneness cues

Next — Chapter 4: Building a Curry Base: Bhuna

A slow-cooked, deeply browned onion-ginger-garlic paste — a fourth, genuinely distinct aromatic-base tradition.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING A CURRY BASE: BHUNA

Indian Cookery

Chapter 4 · Building a Curry Base: Bhuna

Bhuna means "to roast" or "to fry" — and it names both the technique and the real, visible signal that tells you it's done. This is the fourth genuinely distinct aromatic-base tradition across this Cookery Subject, and it shares almost nothing with the other three.

Four Aromatic Bases, Genuinely Different

COURSE	BASE	DONENESS SIGNAL
Italian Cookery	Soffritto — onion, carrot, celery	Soft and sweet — never browned
French Cookery	Mirepoix	Raw into a white stock, or roasted for a brown one
Chinese Cookery	The holy trinity	Fragrant within seconds
Indian Cookery	Bhuna — onion, ginger, garlic, spices	The oil visibly separates and pools at the edges

BHUNA WANTS EXACTLY WHAT SOFFRITTO AVOIDS

Italian Cookery's own soffritto chapter warns specifically against letting the vegetables brown. Bhuna does the opposite on purpose — real, deep browning, well past soft and translucent, is the whole point.

The Process

1 Start with a tadka, if you like

A base tadka (Chapter 3) is a common starting point — whole spices bloomed in hot ghee before anything else goes in.

2 Cook onions low and slow until deeply browned

Cook sliced or finely chopped onion over medium-low heat, stirring regularly, for real time — well past soft, until it's a deep golden-brown, even edging toward mahogany.

3 Add ginger-garlic paste

Add ginger-garlic paste (a wet masala from Chapter 2) once the onion is properly browned, cooking until its own raw smell is gone.

4 Add ground spices and cook them into the paste

Stir in ground spices (turmeric, chili powder, ground cumin and coriander), cooking them directly into the paste — add a small splash of water if it starts to catch on the bottom.

5 Watch for the oil to separate

Keep cooking and stirring until you see real, visible oil pooling and separating out at the edges of the paste — the definitive sign that bhuna is properly done.

PATIENCE, NOT SPEED, IS WHAT THIS TECHNIQUE ASKS FOR

Most of this course's own warnings so far have been about seconds — a burn window closing fast. Bhuna's real risk runs the other way: rushing it with too-high heat produces scorched, bitter onions and spices rather than the genuine, even deep brown the technique actually wants. Give it real time on a gentler heat.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Build a full bhuna base from scratch — onions cooked low and slow to a deep brown, ginger-garlic paste, ground spices — watching closely for the oil to visibly separate.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make a second bhuna base, deliberately rushing it on high heat with less stirring. Compare the colour, texture, and taste against the properly slow-cooked batch.

[→ Solution](#)**KITCHEN PRACTICE 3**

Sauté a portion of onion the fast, Chinese-Cookery-style way — bloomed for just seconds — and taste it directly against your properly slow-cooked bhuna onion.

[→ Solution](#)**QUICK REFERENCE — BUILDING A CURRY BASE: BHUNA**

- Onions cooked low and slow until deeply browned — the opposite of Italian Cookery's own soffritto rule
- Ginger-garlic paste added once the onion is properly browned
- Ground spices cooked directly into the paste, with a splash of water if it catches
- The real doneness test: the oil visibly separates and pools at the edges
- This technique's own real risk is rushing it, not a split-second burn window

Next — Chapter 5: Curry Architecture: Assembling a Full Curry

Base, spices, protein or vegetable, liquid — real order and technique.

CHAPTER 5: CURRY ARCHITECTURE: ASSEMBLING A FULL CURRY

Indian Cookery

Chapter 5 · Curry Architecture: Assembling a Full Curry

Chapters 3 and 4 built two of the pieces — a tempering technique and a proper bhuna base. This chapter assembles them into an actual curry: base, then protein or vegetable, then liquid, then a finish added only once everything else is done cooking.

The Four-Part Structure

Almost every Indian curry follows the same real order, regardless of which specific dish it is:

STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
1. Base	The bhuna from Chapter 4 — onion, ginger-garlic, ground spices, cooked to the oil-separation point
2. Protein or vegetable	Added to the base and browned or sautéed before any liquid goes in
3. Liquid	Water, stock, coconut milk, or yogurt — added last, then simmered to finish cooking and build sauce consistency
4. Finish	Garam masala, fresh coriander, sometimes a finishing tadka — stirred in only once the heat is off or nearly off

THE BASE ISN'T THE WHOLE FLAVOUR — IT'S THE FOUNDATION

A properly made bhuna (Chapter 4) gives a curry its depth and colour. Everything added after it — the protein, the liquid, the finish — builds on top of that foundation rather than replacing it.

Stage 2: Browning the Protein, or Sautéing the Vegetable

Once the bhuna base is done, whatever's going into the curry is added directly to the same pan — not cooked separately first. Meat or chicken pieces are stirred into the hot base and

browned on the outside, coating each piece in the base itself before any liquid is added. A firmer vegetable (potato, cauliflower) gets the same treatment — a few minutes stirred directly in the base, picking up colour and flavour, before liquid goes in.

This step matters for the same reason searing matters in French Cookery's own braising chapter — real browning on the surface builds flavour that a liquid alone can't produce, and it happens most easily while the pan is still relatively dry.

Stage 3: Choosing and Adding the Liquid

Which liquid goes in — and how — genuinely changes the finished dish, and one of the four common choices needs real care to add correctly.

LIQUID	RESULT	HOW IT'S ADDED
Water	A drier, more concentrated curry	Straight in, any temperature
Stock	More depth and body than water	Straight in, any temperature
Coconut milk	A rich, slightly sweet, South Indian-style curry	Straight in, but off harder heat to avoid it splitting
Yogurt	A tangy, creamy North Indian-style curry	Must be tempered first — see below

Why yogurt needs tempering

Yogurt is a dairy product held together by proteins that are stable at room temperature but genuinely unstable against a sudden jump to high heat — added directly into a hot, actively bubbling pan, those proteins seize and separate, curdling into visible grainy lumps floating in a thin, watery liquid rather than a smooth sauce.

The fix is the same principle Chinese Cookery's own cornstarch slurry technique relies on — never shock a delicate ingredient with a sudden jump in temperature:

1 Whisk the yogurt smooth first

Beat the yogurt in a separate bowl until it's completely smooth, with no lumps.

2 Temper it with a spoonful of the hot base

Stir one or two spoonfuls of the hot curry base into the yogurt, off the heat, whisking constantly. This raises the yogurt's own temperature gradually rather than all at once.

3 Add the tempered yogurt back in on low heat

Once warmed this way, stir the yogurt mixture back into the pan on low heat, stirring constantly as it goes in, and avoid letting the pan return to a hard boil afterward.

ONCE YOGURT CURDLES, IT CAN'T BE SMOOTHED BACK OUT

Unlike a split hollandaise, which French Cookery's own egg-technique chapter shows can sometimes be rescued, curdled yogurt in a curry is a done deal — the proteins have already seized. The only real fix is prevention: temper it first, and keep the heat gentle once it's in.

Stage 4: The Finish — Garam Masala and Fresh Coriander

Chapter 2 introduced garam masala as a warm, aromatic spice blend, distinct from the "cooking spices" (turmeric, chili powder, ground cumin and coriander) that go into the bhuna base itself in Chapter 4. That distinction matters here: garam masala is stirred in only near the very end, off the heat or on the gentlest possible heat, not cooked into the base alongside the other ground spices.

Fresh coriander leaves get the same treatment, torn or roughly chopped and stirred in right at the end, completely off heat — the same principle as French Cookery's own chives added at the last moment, or Italian Cookery's own basil, torn and added off heat rather than cooked.

TWO DIFFERENT JOBS FOR SPICE

Cooking spices (Chapter 4) build the curry's own base flavour and need real cooking time in fat to develop. Garam masala's job is different — it's a bright, aromatic top note, and cooking it for a long time dulls exactly the volatile aromatics that make it worth adding at all.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Build a full curry from scratch using Chapter 4's own bhuna base, a protein of your choice browned into it, water or stock as the liquid, simmered to finish, and garam masala plus fresh coriander stirred in at the very end.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Add yogurt to a hot curry base two ways — once poured straight in without tempering, once properly tempered first — and compare the texture of each.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Split a batch of curry base and add garam masala two ways — a portion cooked in early alongside the other ground spices, and a portion stirred in only at the very end — and taste the two side by side.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — CURRY ARCHITECTURE

- Order: base (Ch.4) → protein or vegetable → liquid → finish
- Brown protein or sauté vegetable directly in the base before any liquid is added
- Water/stock go in straight; coconut milk goes in off harder heat; yogurt must be tempered
- Temper yogurt with a spoonful of hot base, whisked in gradually, before returning it to the pan
- Garam masala and fresh coriander go in only at the very end — they're a finish, not a base spice

Next — Chapter 6: Dal — Lentils, Pressure-Cooking & a Finishing Tadka

Cooking lentils to a soft, thick consistency, and finishing the pot with a tadka poured on right before serving.

CHAPTER 6: DAL: LENTILS, PRESSURE-COOKING & A FINISHING TADKA

Indian Cookery

Chapter 6 · Dal: Lentils, Pressure-Cooking & a Finishing Tadka

Dal is lentils cooked down to a soft, thick, almost porridge-like consistency — and it's also the one dish in this course where the tempering technique from Chapter 3 shows up in its purest, most recognisable form: a small pan of sizzling spiced oil poured directly over the finished pot.

Which Lentil, and How It Cooks

Chapter 1 introduced the four lentil varieties this course draws on most. They don't all behave the same way in the pot:

LENTIL	SOAK FIRST?	COOKING TIME
Masoor dal (red lentil)	No	Quick — breaks down easily
Moong dal (split mung)	No	Quick
Toor/arhar dal (pigeon pea)	Optional, helps	Longer — needs more time to soften fully
Chana dal (split chickpea)	Yes, ideally 1-2 hours	Longest — genuinely benefits from soaking

Washing before cooking

Rinse lentils in a few changes of water until the water runs mostly clear, rather than cloudy. This removes surface starch that would otherwise foam up aggressively once the pot comes to a boil — especially with a pressure cooker, where excess foam can genuinely clog the pressure valve.

Cooking: Pressure Cooker or Stovetop

A pressure cooker is the traditional, genuinely faster way to cook dal — but simmering on the stovetop works too, just with more time and more attention.

METHOD	RATIO	REAL SIGNAL FOR DONENESS
Pressure cooker	Roughly 1 part lentils to 3 parts water	A set number of whistles (or an equivalent time/pressure setting) — masoor/moong need only 2-3, toor and chana need considerably more
Stovetop	Same starting ratio, topped up with hot water as it reduces	Lentils fully soft and starting to fall apart when pressed against the side of the pot

"WHISTLES" IS A REAL, PRACTICAL SIGNAL — NOT A FIXED NUMBER

A traditional stovetop pressure cooker signals doneness by the number of whistles the valve makes. A modern electric pressure cooker doesn't whistle the same way, so the equivalent is simply cooking at pressure for roughly the same real time that number of whistles would take — the whistle count is a practical proxy for elapsed cooking time under pressure, not a magic number in itself.

On the stovetop, simmer uncovered or partially covered, stirring occasionally and topping up with hot water if the pot starts to look dry before the lentils are fully soft — dal that runs out of liquid partway through cooking will scorch on the bottom rather than finish softening evenly.

Mashing to the right consistency

Once cooked, dal is typically mashed further with the back of a ladle or a whisk, right in the pot, to break down any lentils that are still holding their shape and bring the whole pot to a smooth, thickened consistency. Add a splash of hot water to loosen it if it's thicker than you want, or continue simmering uncovered to reduce it further if it's too thin.

The Finishing Tadka

Chapter 3 covered the tadka technique two ways — as a base-starting step, and as a finish poured on at the end. Dal is the dish where the finishing use is most traditional and most recognisable: a small separate pan of ghee, heated until shimmering, with cumin seeds, dried red chili, sliced garlic, and a pinch of asafoetida (hing) bloomed briefly until fragrant — then poured, still sizzling, directly over the finished pot of dal.

1 Cook the dal fully first

Have the dal fully cooked, mashed, and at the consistency you want before starting the tadka — the tadka is the very last step, not something to prepare in advance and hold.

2 Heat ghee in a small separate pan

Heat a couple of tablespoons of ghee in a small pan until it shimmers.

3 Bloom the tempering spices

Add cumin seeds first, then dried red chili, sliced garlic, and a pinch of asafoetida, swirling until fragrant — a matter of seconds, the same window Chapter 3 covered.

4 Pour it over the dal while it's still sizzling

Pour the whole pan, oil and spices together, directly over the surface of the dal. It should genuinely sizzle audibly on contact.

POURED ON TOP, NOT STIRRED IN BEFOREHAND

A tadka added to the pot early and simmered along with everything else loses exactly the sharp, fresh aromatic quality that makes it worth doing at all — the same principle Chapter 5 already established for garam masala's own late timing, now applied to whole tempering spices instead of a ground blend.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Cook a full dal from scratch — wash, cook by pressure cooker or stovetop, mash to a smooth consistency, and finish with a poured tadka.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook two small batches of the same lentil, one soaked in advance and one not, and compare the cooking time each needs to reach the same soft consistency.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Split a finished pot of dal and finish it two ways — one with the tadka stirred in and simmered briefly, one with the tadka poured on top just before serving — and compare the aroma of each.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — DAL

- Rinse lentils until the water runs mostly clear before cooking
- Masoor and moong cook quickly with no soak; toor benefits from soaking; chana genuinely needs it
- "Whistles" on a pressure cooker are a practical proxy for cooking time under pressure, not a fixed universal number
- Mash the cooked lentils to your preferred consistency, loosening with hot water if needed
- The finishing tadka is cooked separately and poured on, sizzling, right before serving — never stirred in early

Next — Chapter 7: Yogurt Marination & Dry-Heat Cooking (Tandoori-Style)

Yogurt's real tenderizing chemistry, and a home oven-broiler substitute for a tandoor.

CHAPTER 7: YOGURT MARINATION & DRY-HEAT COOKING (TANDOORI-STYLE)

Indian Cookery

Chapter 7 · Yogurt Marination & Dry-Heat Cooking (Tandoori-Style)

Chapter 5 used yogurt as a sauce ingredient, added carefully to avoid curdling. This chapter uses it in a completely different role — as a marinade, where its job isn't to stay smooth in a simmering pot but to gently tenderize a piece of protein over several hours before it ever meets real heat.

Why Yogurt Tenderizes

Yogurt's mild lactic acid gently loosens the structure of surface proteins over time, without fully denaturing them the way actual cooking heat would. The result is a genuinely more tender surface texture by the time it hits the heat — but the mechanism is milder and slower-acting than a stronger acid like lemon or vinegar, which is exactly why tandoori marinades typically use yogurt as the main base, with only a small amount of lemon juice added alongside it rather than in place of it.

A GENUINELY DIFFERENT TENDERIZING MECHANISM FROM CHINESE COOKERY'S VELVETING

Chinese Cookery's own velveting technique coats meat in an egg-white-and-cornstarch mixture that forms a protective barrier during cooking, keeping moisture in rather than changing the meat's own structure beforehand. Yogurt marination works the opposite way — a slow, mild acid genuinely alters the protein's surface texture over hours, before cooking ever starts. Two real techniques, two genuinely different chemistries, both aimed at the same broad goal.

LONGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER — BUT YOGURT IS FORGIVING

A marinade built on a stronger acid (straight lemon or vinegar, with no yogurt) can start toughening or even "cooking" the surface of the meat if left too long, the same denaturing effect a ceviche relies on deliberately. Yogurt's mild acidity is forgiving

enough to marinate for several hours or even overnight without that risk — one of the real reasons it's the traditional base rather than a stronger acid alone.

Building a Tandoori-Style Marinade

A real tandoori marinade combines yogurt with ginger-garlic paste, a squeeze of lemon juice, ground spices (chili powder, garam masala, ground cumin and coriander), a little oil, and salt. Whisk it smooth, coat the protein thoroughly, and refrigerate — a minimum of a couple of hours, but genuinely better after several hours or overnight.

A Tandoor, and a Home Substitute

A traditional tandoor is a cylindrical clay oven that reaches extreme temperatures — commonly cited around 480°C (900°F) — with skewered meat lowered vertically into intense radiant and convective heat from every side at once. That combination of extreme heat and very short cooking time is what produces real char on the outside while the yogurt-coated interior stays moist.

A HOME OVEN SIMPLY CAN'T REACH A TANDOOR'S REAL TEMPERATURE

This is the same honest gap Italian Cookery's own pizza chapter already covers for a wood-fired oven versus a home oven — a typical home oven's broiler tops out well below a tandoor's real operating range. The fix isn't pretending the gap doesn't exist; it's using the hottest, most direct heat a home kitchen actually has, and accepting a genuinely different (if still very good) result.

The closest practical substitute is a home oven's broiler (grill), set to its highest setting, with the marinated protein placed on a wire rack set over a tray — the rack lets heat circulate underneath as well as from above, and keeps the food out of its own dripping juices rather than steaming in them. A very hot cast-iron pan or ridged grill pan on the stovetop works as a second option, or a finishing step after the broiler.

1 Preheat the broiler on its highest setting

Give it real time to come fully up to temperature before anything goes in, the same discipline Italian Cookery's own pizza chapter insists on for a stone or steel.

2 Place the marinated protein on a wire rack over a tray

This keeps air circulating on all sides and lets excess marinade drip away instead of pooling and steaming the food.

3 Cook close to the heat source, turning once

Position the rack close enough to the broiler element to get real char, turning the pieces once partway through for even colour on both sides.

4 Baste with melted ghee near the end

A brush of melted ghee in the final minute adds shine, a little extra char, and real flavour.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Marinate a protein of your choice in a yogurt-based tandoori marinade for at least a couple of hours, then cook it under a home broiler on a wire rack, basting with ghee near the end.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook two equal pieces of the same protein the same way — one yogurt-marinated, one plain and unmarinated — and compare texture and moisture.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Marinate two portions for genuinely different lengths of time — one for roughly 20-30 minutes, one overnight — cook both the same way, and compare tenderness and depth of flavour.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — YOGURT MARINATION & DRY-HEAT COOKING

- Yogurt's mild lactic acid gently tenderizes protein surfaces over hours — a genuinely different mechanism from Chinese Cookery's own egg-white/cornstarch velveting
- Yogurt's mildness is why marinades can safely go overnight, unlike a straight lemon or vinegar marinade
- A tandoor's real operating heat (~480°C/900°F) can't be matched by a home oven — the same honest gap Italian Cookery's own pizza chapter names for wood-fired ovens
- A wire rack over a tray, under a fully preheated broiler, is the closest practical home substitute
- A final baste of melted ghee adds shine, char, and flavour in the last minute of cooking

Next — Chapter 8: Rice — Basmati & the Technique for Separate, Fluffy Grains

A real, honest contrast against Japanese Cookery's own sticky short-grain rice technique.

CHAPTER 8: RICE: BASMATI & THE TECHNIQUE FOR SEPARATE, FLUFFY GRAINS

Indian Cookery

Chapter 8 · Rice: Basmati & the Technique for Separate, Fluffy Grains

Japanese Cookery's own rice chapter chases stickiness on purpose — cohesive grains that hold together for chopsticks and sushi. Basmati rice chases the exact opposite: long, dry, separate grains that never clump. Same starting ingredient, same basic wash-soak-cook shape, genuinely opposite goal.

Basmati vs. Japanese Short-Grain: A Real Contrast

	BASMATI	JAPANESE SHORT-GRAIN
Goal	Dry, separate, fluffy grains	Sticky, cohesive grains
Rinsing	Aggressive — rinsed until water runs clear, to strip surface starch almost entirely	Rinsed until mostly clear, but more gently, keeping a little starch for cohesion
Water ratio	Less water relative to rice — roughly 1:1.5	Closer to 1:1
Soaking	Yes, 20-30 minutes — lets the long grain fully hydrate and elongate	Yes, 20-30 minutes — for even cooking
Finishing	Fluffed with a fork to keep grains separate	Never lift the lid mid-cook; rested to finish via steam

THE RINSE-AND-SOAK SHAPE IS GENUINELY SIMILAR — THE INTENSITY AND INTENT AREN'T

Both rice traditions rinse and soak before cooking. But basmati's rinsing is deliberately more thorough, aimed at removing as much surface starch as possible, since any leftover starch is exactly what would make the grains stick together — the opposite of what Japanese Cookery's own gentler rinse is trying to preserve.

The Absorption Method

1 Rinse thoroughly

Rinse basmati rice in several changes of water, swishing it with your hand each time, until the water runs mostly clear.

2 Soak

Soak the rinsed rice in fresh water for 20-30 minutes, then drain well. This lets the grains hydrate and elongate fully during cooking without breaking.

3 Cook with a measured amount of water

Add the soaked, drained rice to a pot with roughly 1.5 times its own volume in water, bring to a boil, then reduce to the lowest heat, cover tightly, and simmer without lifting the lid until the water is fully absorbed.

4 Rest, then fluff with a fork

Take the pot off the heat and let it rest, covered, for several minutes before fluffing gently with a fork — never a spoon, which mashes the grains and releases the starch you worked to remove.

A FORK, NOT A SPOON

Stirring finished basmati with a spoon crushes grains against each other and against the pot, breaking them and releasing more starch right at the last step — undoing much of what the earlier rinsing and soaking were meant to prevent. A fork's own thin tines lift and separate the grains instead of pressing them together.

A Pilau-Style Variation

A simple pilau (or pulao) adds one extra step before the water goes in: sautéing the rinsed, drained rice briefly in ghee, often with a few whole spices, until the grains look glossy and slightly translucent at the edges — a couple of minutes, no more.

THE SAME STARTING TECHNIQUE AS RISOTTO, AIMED AT THE OPPOSITE RESULT

Italian Cookery's own risotto chapter calls this same step *tostatura* — coating rice grains in fat before any liquid goes in. There, the goal is to control how much starch the grains release later, building a creamy, cohesive dish. Here, the fat coating serves the opposite purpose: it helps seal each grain's own surface, making the finished rice even less likely to clump than the plain absorption method alone.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Cook a full pot of basmati rice using the absorption method — rinse thoroughly, soak, cook with the correct water ratio, rest, and fluff with a fork.

[→ Solution](#)**KITCHEN PRACTICE 2**

Cook two small batches of basmati the same way, except skip rinsing entirely for one of them. Compare stickiness once cooked.

[→ Solution](#)**KITCHEN PRACTICE 3**

Make a simple pilau — rice briefly sautéed in ghee with a few whole spices before the water goes in — and compare its texture and separation directly against a plain absorption-cooked batch.

[→ Solution](#)**QUICK REFERENCE — BASMATI RICE**

- Basmati's goal — dry, separate, fluffy grains — is the direct opposite of Japanese Cookery's own sticky short-grain technique
- Rinse basmati aggressively, until the water runs clear, to strip surface starch
- Soak 20-30 minutes before cooking to let the grains hydrate and elongate
- Roughly 1:1.5 rice-to-water, simmered covered, then rested off heat before fluffing
- Fluff with a fork, never a spoon, to avoid crushing grains and releasing starch at the last step
- A pilau's brief sauté in ghee (tostatura's own opposite-purpose cousin) helps seal grains for even less clumping

Next — Chapter 9: Chapati & Roti — Unleavened Flatbread

Atta dough, rolling, and the tava-then-open-flame puff technique.

CHAPTER 9: CHAPATI & ROTI: UNLEAVENED FLATBREAD

Indian Cookery

Chapter 9 · Chapati & Roti: Unleavened Flatbread

Roti and chapati have no yeast, no baking powder, and no sourdough starter — and yet a properly made one puffs up like a balloon on the heat. The entire lift comes from trapped steam, the same real leavening principle French Cookery's own choux pastry relies on, applied here to a rolled dough sheet instead of a piped batter.

Atta Dough

Roti and chapati are made from atta — a finely milled whole wheat flour, distinct from the refined all-purpose flour (maida) used elsewhere in this course. Combine atta with water, a pinch of salt, and a little oil if you like, and knead until smooth, soft, and elastic — genuinely more than a quick mix, but softer and less firm than a bread dough.

A REAL MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN ITALIAN COOKERY'S PASTA AND FRENCH COOKERY'S PASTRY

This dough wants real, moderate gluten development — enough elasticity to roll thin without tearing and to hold together as it puffs, but nowhere near the deliberate, sought-after gluten of Italian Cookery's own fresh pasta dough. It occupies the same real middle ground Chinese Cookery's own dumpling dough already sits in between that pasta dough's gluten-seeking kneading and French Cookery's own gluten-avoiding pastry.

Rest the kneaded dough, covered with a damp cloth or an upturned bowl, for at least 15-30 minutes before rolling. Resting relaxes the gluten just formed by kneading, the same reason Italian Cookery's own pasta dough gets a rest before it's rolled.

Rolling for Even Thickness

Divide the rested dough into small balls, dust lightly with dry flour, and roll each one into a thin, even round — rotating the dough as you roll, rather than always rolling in the same

direction, to keep the shape round and the thickness consistent all the way across.

UNEVEN THICKNESS IS THE SINGLE MOST COMMON REASON A ROTI WON'T PUFF

A thinner patch cooks and seals faster than a thicker one right beside it, so steam escapes through the weaker spot instead of inflating the whole round evenly. Rolling for consistent thickness across the entire round matters more than getting the shape perfectly circular.

Cooking: Tava First, Then Open Flame

1 Cook the first side on a dry, hot tava

Place the rolled round on a dry cast-iron or non-stick griddle over medium-high heat. Small bubbles should start appearing on the surface after 30-60 seconds.

2 Flip and cook the second side

Flip once bubbles appear, and cook the second side until small light-brown spots start showing.

3 Transfer directly to an open flame

Using tongs, move the roti directly onto an open gas flame (or, if the second side isn't quite done, flip once more on the tava first). Within a few seconds, it should inflate into a full balloon shape.

4 Remove once fully puffed

Take it off the flame as soon as it's fully puffed, before any part scorches.

Why it actually puffs

The brief cooking on the tava partially seals the surface on both sides of the rolled dough, forming a thin, slightly firmer skin over the still-moist interior. Once that sealed round meets the open flame's intense, direct heat, the moisture trapped between the two sealed surfaces

flashes into steam almost instantly — and because it has nowhere else to go, that steam pushes the two layers of dough apart, inflating the whole round into a hollow balloon in a matter of seconds.

THE SAME PRINCIPLE AS CHOUX PASTRY, APPLIED DIFFERENTLY

French Cookery's own choux pastry gets its entire rise from steam alone, with no baking powder or yeast involved — the exact same leavening principle at work here. The mechanism differs: choux traps steam inside a batter that firms around it into a hollow shell, while a roti traps steam between two sealed layers of a rolled dough sheet, separating them into a balloon. Different shapes, same underlying physics — steam is the only leavening agent either bread ever gets.

No gas burner at home? Press the roti gently and repeatedly with a folded cloth on the hot tava itself, working around the edges — the pressure encourages the same trapped steam to build and separate the layers, producing a similar (if less dramatic) puff without an open flame.

NEVER LEAVE AN OPEN FLAME UNATTENDED

Keep tongs in hand the entire time a roti is over open flame, watch it constantly, and remove it the moment it's fully puffed — a few extra seconds is the difference between a perfect puff and a scorched spot.

Brush the finished roti with a little ghee or butter while it's still hot, and keep cooked rotis wrapped in a clean cloth as you go — the trapped warmth and residual steam keep them soft.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Make a full batch of roti from scratch — atta dough, a proper rest, evenly rolled rounds, cooked on the tava and puffed over an open flame (or cloth-pressed on the tava as an alternative).

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Deliberately roll one round unevenly — noticeably thicker on one side than the other — and try to puff it the same way. Compare against a properly evenly-rolled round.

[→ Solution](#)**KITCHEN PRACTICE 3**

Roll one portion of dough immediately after kneading, with no rest at all, and compare how it handles against a properly rested portion of the same dough.

[→ Solution](#)**QUICK REFERENCE — CHAPATI & ROTI**

- Atta dough wants moderate gluten development — softer than pasta dough, more elastic than pastry
- Rest the kneaded dough at least 15-30 minutes before rolling, to relax the gluten
- Roll for even thickness across the whole round — uneven thickness is the most common cause of a failed puff
- Cook first side until bubbles appear, flip, then finish on an open flame (or press with a cloth on the tava)
- The puff is pure trapped steam — the same leavening principle as French Cookery's own choux pastry, applied to a rolled dough instead of a batter
- Never leave an open flame unattended; remove the roti the instant it's fully puffed

Next — Chapter 10: Capstone — A Thali

A composed platter of several small dishes served together — dal, a curry, rice, roti, and a yogurt side.

CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — A THALI

Indian Cookery

Chapter 10 · Capstone: A Thali

A thali is a genuinely different way of composing a meal from anything this Cookery Subject has closed with before — several small dishes, each in its own portion, served together on one plate at the same time, rather than courses eaten one after another or shared dishes passed around a table.

A Third Structural Model

Three sibling courses have already closed with three different real structures: Italian Cookery and French Cookery both build toward a sequence of separate courses, eaten one after the other. Chinese Cookery closes with several dishes served together, family-style, for the whole table to share at once. A thali is neither — it's a single, personal plate, divided into small individual portions of several different dishes, all arriving together and all meant to be eaten in whatever order and combination the diner chooses, rather than following any fixed sequence at all.

COURSE	CAPSTONE STRUCTURE
Japanese Cookery	One balanced meal — rice, soup, main, sides — ichiju-sansai
Italian Cookery	Sequential courses — antipasto, primo, secondo
French Cookery	Sequential courses — entrée, plat principal, dessert
Chinese Cookery	Shared dishes for the table, served together, family-style
Indian Cookery	A thali — several small individual portions on one plate, all served at once

Planning: Work Backward From the Slowest Element

A thali is genuinely more of a coordination challenge than a single dish — five components all need to be ready at roughly the same moment, but they don't all take the same amount of

time or attention.

DISH	REAL TIME	WHEN TO START
Curry (Ch.4-5)	Longest — bhuna base plus a real simmer	First
Dal (Ch.6)	Moderate — faster under pressure	Second, alongside the curry
Rice (Ch.8)	Includes a genuine soak and rest, but little active attention	Third — timed to rest while the curry and dal finish
Raita	Quick	Anytime, and chilled ahead
Roti (Ch.9)	Fast to cook, but must be fresh	Last — only once everything else is ready to plate

ROTI IS MADE LAST, ON PURPOSE

Roti's own whole appeal — a hot, soft, freshly puffed bread — is lost if it sits and cools before it's served. Everything else on the thali can rest, be reheated gently, or simply wait a few minutes; roti genuinely can't, so it's the very last thing cooked, going straight from the flame to the plate.

A Third Role for Yogurt: Raita

This course has already used yogurt two genuinely different ways — tempered into a curry as a sauce (Chapter 5), and used raw as a marinade base (Chapter 7). A thali's own cooling side dish, raita, gives it a third: whisked smooth and left completely raw and uncooked, folded together with grated cucumber, a pinch of salt, and a little roasted, ground cumin (Chapter 2's own dry-roasting technique, applied here to a cold dish rather than a cooked one) — chilled, and served as-is.

NO TEMPERING NEEDED HERE

Chapter 5's own tempering warning only applies when yogurt is going into something hot. Raita is never heated at all, so the curdling risk that chapter spent real time

explaining simply doesn't apply — a genuine case where the same ingredient's own real chemistry only matters in some of its uses, not all of them.

Assembling the Plate

Once everything is ready, arrange rice in one section of the plate or a tray, the curry and dal each in their own small bowl or section, raita in a small separate bowl, and the freshly-cooked roti alongside — a wedge of lemon or a simple pickle rounds it out if you have one on hand.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Plan and cook a full thali — a curry, a dal, rice, roti, and a raita — using the backward-planning sequence above, so every component is ready to plate at roughly the same time.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Cook a second thali, but this time make the roti in advance and let it sit for 10 minutes before serving, rather than cooking it last. Compare it directly against freshly-made roti.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Swap the curry's protein or vegetable for a different one than you've used in earlier chapters, keeping the rest of the thali the same, and note what changes and what stays the same in the finished plate.

→ Solution

Where Every Piece Came From

THALI COMPONENT	CHAPTERS IT DRAWS FROM
Curry	2 (spices), 3 (tempering), 4 (bhuna base), 5 (curry architecture)
Dal	6
Rice	8
Roti	9
Raita	2 (roasting cumin), a third use of yogurt beyond Chapters 5 and 7

A real, honest note on scope: this course doesn't cover South Indian fermented dishes like dosa or idli, which rely on a genuinely different technique — real fermentation — not touched on anywhere in this course; biryani, a distinct layered rice-and-meat dish with its own dum-cooking method; or Indian sweets (mithai), which would be their own separate topic entirely. Any of these would make a genuine future companion course.

QUICK REFERENCE — BUILDING A THALI

- A thali is several small individual portions on one plate, served together — distinct from sequential courses (Italian, French) and shared family-style dishes (Chinese)
- Plan backward from the slowest element — start the curry first, then the dal, then time the rice's own soak/rest to finish alongside them
- Roti is always made last, cooked fresh, and served immediately — it's the one component that can't wait
- Raita gives yogurt a third distinct role in this course: a cold, uncooked condiment, with none of Chapter 5's own tempering concerns

Course Complete

This closes Indian Cookery's own 10 chapters — pantry and spice fundamentals, tempering, a

proper bhuna base, full curry assembly, dal, yogurt marination and dry-heat cooking, basmati rice, unleavened flatbread, and a full thali bringing every technique together on one plate.