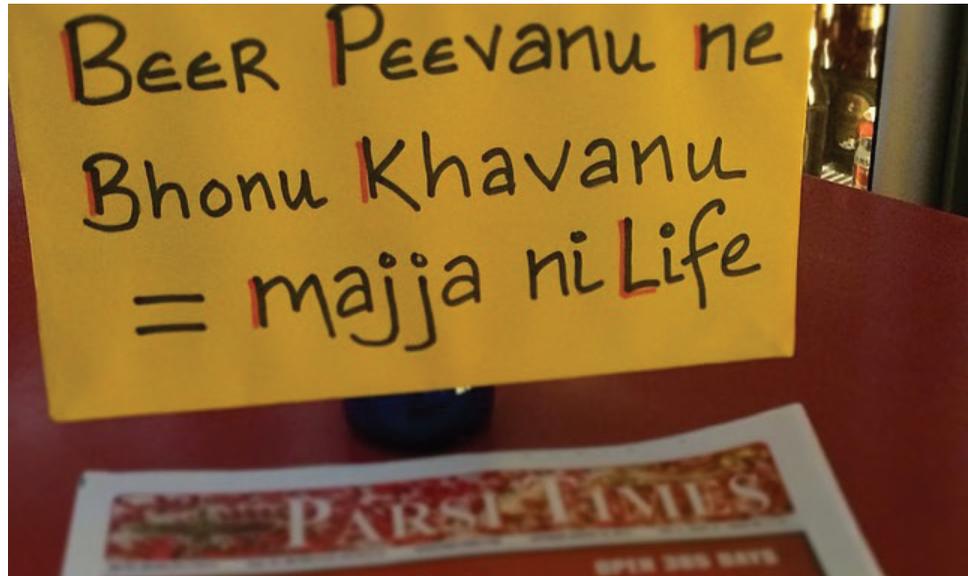


Ask any stranger about Parsis and the first thing that will come to mind is the Tata family. The second? ‘Dhansak’ – a Sunday favourite in Parsi households and the dish that has made Parsis famous. Parsi food – also commonly referred to as ‘bhonu’ by the community – originated in Iran from where the Parsis fled during the collapse of the Sassanian era. Over the years, the cuisine has morphed and today draws its inspiration from a variety of communities, including the Goans, Gujaratis and Maharashtrians.

One of the things that make Bawa bhonu unique though, is its focus on meat and seafood. An ordinary meal at a Parsi household features at least one chicken or meat dish with the side dish inevitably being some leftover vegetables, per eedu (egg).



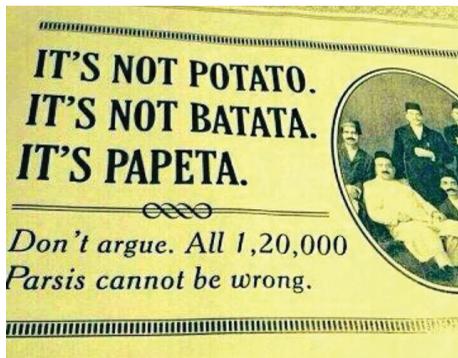
Talk to any Parsi about vegetarian food and they will either stare blankly, try to convert you to becoming a non-vegetarian or cook up something which has eggs, potatoes or the ultimate fallback – paneer.

It is fair to say that aside from a handful of Bawas, the community is predominantly meat loving and one

only has to attend a Parsi wedding to attest to this fact. ‘Sali Boti’, ‘Patra ni Machchi’, ‘Aatheli Marghi’, ‘Kid Gosht’, ‘Saas ni Machchi’ and ‘Mutton Pulao’ are all regular features at these weddings. However, one will be hard pressed to find anything for the vegetarians. In fact, many Parsi wedding caterers completely outsource the vegetarian component altogether, with guests having to eat

# BAWAS AND THEIR BHONU

Most Parsis acknowledge that when they are called bawas, it is a term of endearment. And when people mock them about using egg in almost every dish, they smile benignly and invite that person to join them for a meal. That’s the best way to sum up Parsis – eccentric, courteous and extremely genial.



a thali which while delicious, hardly has any Parsi flavours.

### EGGS, EGGS, EVERYWHERE

Another unique aspect of the cuisine is our borderline obsession with eggs; be it 'Sali per

Eedu' 'Bheeda per Eedu', 'Akuri', omelettes, or hard-boiled eggs in curries. The saying 'When in doubt, break an egg on it' is something that all bawas will solemnly nod their heads to. As an amateur chef myself, I am at a complete loss for ideas when I have to create a dish that is both vegetarian and eggless. I won't even go into making something suitable for vegans, as that is another challenge altogether!

For a community that numbers not more than 100,000 globally and is constantly rumored to be on the verge of extinction, the Parsis

continue to make their presence felt and do so best through their food! Yes, the Irani cafes may be shutting down and you may soon have to make Mawa Cakes at home but that doesn't mean that the Parsi cuisine is dying. With outlets such as Ashmick's Snack Shack, Ideal Corner and Jumjoji in Mumbai, Sodawaterbottleopenerwala in Gurgaon and home-chefs like yours truly, I am convinced that the humble Dhandar-Patio (a favourite with all bawas) will live yet another generation – or two.

- Perzen Patel

## SALI BOTI

*Making Sali Boti is as easy as 1-2-3. However, the whole thing will still end up taking about a couple of hours, as the best way to cook this is to let the mutton slow cook. Pressure-cooking is a possibility, but purist Parsis will balk at this suggestion.*

Serves: 4 • Cooking time: 1 hour

### Ingredients:

- 800 gm boneless mutton, cut into small chunks
- 1 heaped tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- 1 heaped tbsp green chilli and jeera paste
- ½ cup yoghurt
- 2 tbsp oil
- 4 large onions, chopped finely
- 4 tomatoes, pureed in the grinder
- ½ bottle pasta sauce
- 4 bay leaves
- 6-8 cloves
- 2 tsp each of turmeric, red chilli and garam masala powder
- 2 tbsp vinegar
- Lemon, as required to add sourness
- 2 tbsp sugar or a 3" piece of jaggery
- Salt, to taste
- Few sprigs of coriander leaves, finely chopped
- 150 gm fine sali (potato sticks)

### Method:

1. Marinate the mutton in salt, ginger garlic and green chilli pastes as well as the yoghurt.
2. Cover the bowl with some cling wrap and let the meat marinate for at least 2 - 3 hours. The longer you marinate the meat, the faster it will cook and the better it will taste. Marinate it overnight if time permits.
3. In a non-stick or heavy bottomed pan, heat the oil and add in the finely chopped onions. Fry the onions until they are golden pink in colour. Don't rush this step or your onions will not emulsify into the dish later - they must cook fully and become translucent first.
4. Add in the pureed tomatoes as well as the pasta sauce. If pasta sauce is not easily available, puree two more tomatoes and add to the mix.
5. Add in the mutton, masalas, vinegar, sugar, bay leaves and cloves. Give everything a good stir and cover your pot so that the meat can start slow cooking on a low-medium flame. Check on the meat every 15 minutes. Covering the pot may have made your gravy slightly watery so leave the pot slightly open so that water can evaporate.
6. Once the masala has cooked, adjust the flavor. If it's too spicy or not sour enough, squeeze the juice of one lemon.

Add some sugar if you prefer it to be sour and sweet. The whole process of the mutton cooking and the tomato gravy evaporating will take about 40 minutes.

7. Garnish the gravy with some sali and coriander leaves. Serve with some Brun Pav.

