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MUSIKALA

Zauq-e-Sukhan

Ek Shām — Nawabi Dastarkhān aur Ghazal

an evening of ghazals & nawabi dastarkhān

DATE & TIME

October 9th, at 7 PM

VENUE

Ashburn Farm Association

21400 Windmill Drive, Ashburn, VA 20147



PRESENTED BY MUSIKALA

KHAYAL-O-TASAWWUR (CONCEPT & PRODUCTION) **Dr. Uday Kamath**

NAZIM-E-MEHFIL (MASTER OF CEREMONY) **Dr. Rizwan Ali**

VOCALS **Diptanu Das & Swati Kanitkar**

MUSICIANS

Shreyas Ravi (Harmonium) - Soumya Chakraverty (Sarod) - Mallar Goswami (Tabla) - Tej Kanitkar (Guitar)

MUSIKALA PRESENTS

Zauq-e-Sukhan

Ek Shām — Nawabi Dastarkhān aur Ghazal

❖

THE DASTARKHĀN

A Booklet of the Three-Course Meal: Its History & Its Recipes

Friday, October 9, 2026 · Ashburn, Virginia

Conceptualized & prepared by Dr. Uday Kamath

musikala.org/zauq-e-sukhan

AN INTRODUCTION

The Dastarkhān of the Courts

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Dastarkhān means, literally, the cloth spread for a meal. In the courts of Awadh, Delhi and Hyderabad the word came to mean far more: the whole ceremony of eating together, with its courtesies, its order of dishes, and its unhurried conversation. A mehfil of poetry and a dastarkhān of food were two halves of the same evening. The great households of Lucknow would no more host one without the other than serve a sher without its second misra.

Each court gave the shared tradition its own accent. Delhi, the imperial ancestor, codified the kormas, kababs and breads of the Mughal table in its karkhana kitchens, and gave the world the nihari that rose from the laborers' dawn to the tables of the nobility. Awadh answered with nafāsat and nazākat, refinement and delicacy, perfecting the sealed-pot art of dum pukht, the perfumed yakhni pulao, and a vegetarian repertoire of real courtly rank. In the Deccan, the kitchens of Hyderabad folded Mughlai technique into southern boldness, mint and sour and heat, and produced the kacchi biryani, the boldest rice dish in the subcontinent.

Tonight's dastarkhān travels those three courts in a single plate. Nothing on it has been ordered from a restaurant. Every dish is made by hand, at home, following recipes carried through hundreds of years of tradition and prepared with the patience the Nawabi kitchen demands. And in true dastarkhān style it is not a buffet. Each guest is served a hot, plated meal, one per ticket, chosen at booking, because in the old courts food was presented to a guest, never fetched by one.

A NOTE FROM THE KITCHEN

These pages share the history of each dish and a home recipe for it, the same recipes, in spirit, from which tonight's meal is cooked. Take them home, cook them slowly, and let the dastarkhān continue at your own table. Pehle lazzat, phir sukhan: first the flavor, then the poetry.

THE EVENING'S MENU

One Plate, Three Courses

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Sabz-e-Bahār

The Vegetarian Plate · 'The Green of Spring'

APPETIZER · Paneer Malai Kabob

MAIN COURSE · Malai Vegetable Awadhi Kofta · Veg Pulao · Roghani Naan · Raita

DESSERT · Awadhi Kheer

❖

Zaa'iqa-e-Sultānī

The Non-Vegetarian Plate · 'The Sultan's Flavor'

APPETIZER · Murgh Seekh Kabob

MAIN COURSE · Mutton Nalli Nihari · Hyderabadi Chicken Biryani · Roghani Naan · Raita

DESSERT · Awadhi Kheer

❖

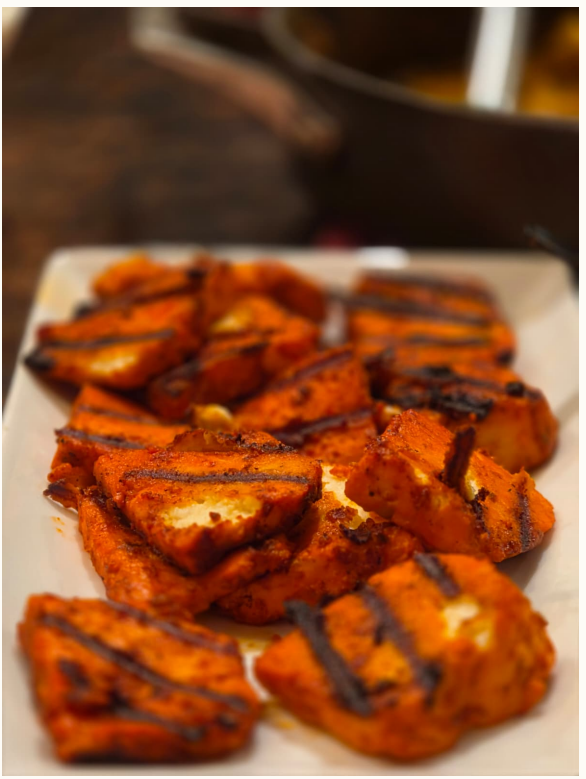
One plate per ticket, chosen at booking · served hot, dastarkhān style

COURSE ONE · APPETIZER · SABZ-E-BAHĀR

Paneer Malai Kabob

The vegetarian kabob of the Awadhi court: white, perfumed, and very soft

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THE HISTORY

The Awadhi kitchen prized one quality above all: nazākat, or delicacy. Lucknow's cooks competed to make food so tender it asked nothing of the teeth. Legend credits the famous galawat kababs to a nawab who had lost his, but the truth is simpler: softness was the court's idea of courtesy, and a kabob that resisted the eater had failed.

The malai kabob brings that philosophy to the vegetarian table, which in Awadh was never an afterthought. Hindu nobility, Kayasth officials and vegetarian guests sat at the same dastarkhān as the nawabs, and the khānsāmās

answered with dishes of equal rank. Here paneer is folded into cream, hung curd and cashew, scented only with green cardamom and white pepper. The spicing is kept deliberately mild, so that the smoke of the fire and the sweetness of the milk come through.

THE RECIPE

Serves six as an appetizer

Ingredients

- 600 g fresh paneer, cut into 2-inch cubes
- ½ cup thick cream (malai)
- ⅓ cup finely grated mild cheese
- 3 tbsp hung (strained) yogurt
- 1 tbsp cashew paste
- 1 tbsp ginger–garlic paste
- 1 green chili, minced fine
- ½ tsp white pepper · ½ tsp green cardamom powder
- 1 tsp kasuri methi, crushed between the palms
- Juice of half a lemon · salt to taste
- 2 tbsp melted ghee or butter, for basting

Method

1. Whisk the cream, cheese, hung yogurt, cashew paste, ginger–garlic, chili, spices, kasuri methi and lemon into a thick, smooth marinade. Add salt last and taste; it should be gentle, not sharp.
2. Fold in the paneer cubes with your fingers, coating each piece without breaking it. Rest, covered, for 1–2 hours in the refrigerator.
3. Thread onto skewers, leaving a little air between the pieces. Grill or roast in a very hot oven (220 °C / 425 °F) for 10–12 minutes, turning once, until the edges catch pale gold.
4. Baste with ghee in the final two minutes. Rest for a moment, finish with a squeeze of lemon, and serve with mint chutney.

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COURSE ONE · APPETIZER · ZAA'IQA-E-SULTĀNĪ

Murgh Seekh Kabob

From Turkic campfires to the braziers of the Mughal court

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THE HISTORY

Seekh means simply 'skewer', and the dish rode into Hindustan with Central Asian horsemen who cooked meat over open fire. What arrived as soldiers' food was refined in the royal kitchens of Delhi and Lucknow: the mince ground finer, the spices rounder, the fat balanced so the kabob stayed juicy on the coal.

Lucknow tells the story of Kakori: the Nawab of that town, stung by a British officer's remark at his own banquet that the seekh kababs were coarse, set his khānsāmās to work for weeks until they produced a seekh so smooth it

dissolved on the tongue. Whether or not the taunt was real, the standard it set endures: in a courtly seekh kabob, no fiber of meat, no shard of spice should announce itself. Everything melts into one warm, smoky whole.

THE RECIPE

Serves six as an appetizer

Ingredients

- 700 g chicken mince, from thigh (fat is flavor)
- 1 small onion, minced fine and squeezed dry
- 2 tbsp ginger–garlic paste
- 2 green chilies, minced · a handful of coriander leaves, chopped
- 1 tsp roasted cumin powder · 1 tsp garam masala · ½ tsp white pepper
- 2 tbsp roasted gram flour (besan), as binder
- 2 tbsp softened butter, plus more for basting
- Salt to taste · a piece of charcoal for smoking (optional)
- Lemon wedges and sliced onion, to serve

Method

1. Mix the mince with every ingredient except the basting butter. Knead for a minute until the mixture turns slightly sticky; that is what holds it to the skewer. Chill for one hour.
2. With wet hands, press the mince along skewers into long, even kababs.
3. Grill over coals or roast at 220 °C (425 °F) for 12–15 minutes, turning, until cooked through and blistered in places. Baste with butter toward the end.
4. For the dhungar finish, rest the kababs in a covered pot with a piece of live charcoal doused in ghee for two minutes. The smoke is the signature.
5. Serve hot, with lemon and laccha onions.

COURSE TWO · MAIN · SABZ-E-BAHĀR

Malai Vegetable Awadhi Kofta

Persian kufta, perfected in the vegetarian kitchens of Lucknow

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THE HISTORY

The kofta came to India from Persia, from the verb kuftan, to pound, and it began as a dish of minced meat. Awadh did something quietly radical with it: the vegetarian version became a dish of equal prestige. Chroniclers of old Lucknow describe vegetarian cooks whose craft rivalled any in the royal kitchen, turning gourds and greens into dishes that could stand in for the grandest meats.

This kofta belongs to that lineage: a dumpling of vegetables and paneer around a heart of cashew and raisin, laid in a pale cream-and-nut gravy of the safed, or white, style, the korma the Awadhi table reserved for its most honored vegetarian guests. The gravy looks plain. It is anything but.

THE RECIPE

Serves six

Ingredients

- For the kofta: 2 cups mixed vegetables (carrot, beans, peas, potato), boiled, mashed and squeezed dry
- 1 cup grated paneer · 2 tbsp cream
- 3 tbsp roasted gram flour or cornstarch
- ½ tsp green cardamom powder · ½ tsp white pepper · salt
- 2 tbsp chopped cashews and raisins, for the filling · oil for frying
- For the gravy: 1 cup boiled-onion paste · ½ cup cashew paste
- ½ cup whisked yogurt · ¼ cup cream · 1 tbsp ginger–garlic paste
- 4 green cardamoms, 2 cloves, 1 bay leaf · ½ tsp white pepper
- 3 tbsp ghee · a few drops of kewra water · salt

Method

1. Knead the mashed vegetables with paneer, cream, flour, spices and salt into a dough that holds its shape. Form balls around a pinch of cashew–raisin filling.
2. Fry the koftas in medium-hot oil to an even gold. Drain and set aside.
3. For the gravy, warm ghee with the whole spices, add ginger–garlic, then the boiled-onion paste; cook gently without letting it color.
4. Add cashew paste, then the yogurt off the heat, whisking constantly. Return to a low flame and simmer gently, never at a hard boil, until silky. Season with white pepper and salt; finish with cream and kewra.
5. Only at serving, lay the koftas in the hot gravy and bring to the table at once.

COURSE TWO · MAIN · SABZ-E-BAHĀR

Veg Pulao, Awadhi Style

Every grain separate, every grain perfumed

❖



THE HISTORY

Lucknow has always insisted, sometimes loudly, that the pulao and not the biryani is the true aristocrat of rice. Abdul Halim Sharar, the great chronicler of the city, called the biryani a clumsy meal next to a really good pulao, and the Awadhi kitchen proved the point with yakhni pulao: rice cooked not in water but in a patiently drawn stock, so that the perfume lives inside each grain rather than sitting on top of it.

The technique behind it is dum pukht, the sealed-pot method that Awadhi kitchens raised to an art in the eighteenth century, in the era of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula's great public kitchens. The vegetarian pulao takes the same road: a yakhni drawn from whole spices tied in muslin, vegetables handled lightly, and a final rest under a sealed lid where the steam finishes what the flame began.

THE RECIPE

Serves six

Ingredients

- 2 cups aged basmati rice, rinsed and soaked 30 minutes
- For the yakhni: 4 cups water · 1 onion, halved · a muslin potli of 4 green cardamoms, 1 black cardamom, 4 cloves, 1-inch cinnamon, 1 blade of mace, 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 3 tbsp ghee · 1 onion, sliced thin
- 1½ cups mixed vegetables (carrot, beans, peas, cauliflower), in neat pieces
- ½ tsp white pepper · salt
- 2 tbsp warm milk with a pinch of saffron, or a few drops of kewra
- A few mint leaves

Method

1. Simmer the yakhni ingredients for 25 minutes; discard the potli and onion. You need about 3½ cups of fragrant stock, salted to taste.
2. In a heavy pot, fry the sliced onion in ghee to a deep gold. Add the vegetables and toss for two minutes, no more.
3. Add the drained rice and turn gently until the grains gleam. Pour in the hot yakhni and the white pepper.
4. Boil uncovered until the water sits level with the rice. Scatter saffron milk and mint, seal the lid tight (a ring of dough, in the old way), and leave on the lowest flame for 10 minutes. Rest 10 more before opening.
5. Loosen with a fork from the edges inward, so the grains stay whole.

COURSE TWO · MAIN · ZAA'IQA-E-SULTĀNĪ

Hyderabadi Chicken Biryani

The Deccan's gift: meat and rice cooked together in one sealed pot

❖



THE HISTORY

If Lucknow perfected the pulao, Hyderabad perfected the biryani. In the kitchens of the Nizams, where Mughlai technique met the Deccan's own taste for sour, heat and herb, the kacchi biryani was born: raw marinated meat laid under half-cooked rice and sealed, so that both finish together and neither can be cooked without the other. It is the most demanding rice dish in the Indian repertoire, and the proudest possession of the Hyderabadi table.

Where Awadhi food whispers, Hyderabadi food speaks in a warm, confident voice: mint and coriander in handfuls, green chili, a souring of lemon and

yogurt, and the deep sweetness of birista, onions fried to mahogany. The pot is opened only at the table, and the first rising breath of saffron and smoke belongs to the guests.

THE RECIPE

Serves six

Ingredients

- 1 kg chicken, bone-in pieces
- 1 cup thick yogurt · 2 tbsp ginger–garlic paste · juice of 1 lemon
- Birista from 3 large onions, fried crisp (reserve a third for the top)
- 1½ tsp red chili powder · ¼ tsp turmeric · 1½ tsp garam masala
- A large handful each of mint and coriander leaves · 3 green chilies, slit
- 3 cups aged basmati rice
- Whole spices for the rice water: 4 cardamoms, 4 cloves, 1-inch cinnamon, 1 bay leaf, 1 tsp shahi zeera · salt
- ½ cup warm milk with a generous pinch of saffron · 3 tbsp ghee

Method

1. Marinate the chicken in yogurt, ginger–garlic, lemon, ground spices, two-thirds of the birista, half the herbs, the chilies and salt, for at least 4 hours, overnight if you can.
2. Boil the rice with the whole spices and plenty of salt until 70 percent done; a grain should break with a bite left at its heart. Drain.
3. Lay the marinated chicken flat in a heavy pot. Cover with the rice. Scatter the reserved birista and herbs, pour over the saffron milk and ghee.
4. Seal the lid. Cook on high for 5 minutes until steam builds, then on the lowest flame for 25–30 minutes. Rest, sealed, for 15 minutes more.
5. Open at the table. Serve from top to bottom in one motion, so every plate carries rice, chicken and the saffron crown.

COURSE TWO · MAIN · ZAA'IQA-E-SULTĀNĪ

Mutton Nalli Nihari

Shahjahanabad's dawn dish, slow as the night is long

❖



THE HISTORY

Nihari takes its name from the Arabic nahār, the morning, because it was cooked all night and eaten at dawn, after the first prayer. Delhi and Lucknow both claim its birth, and perhaps both are right; but it was in the walled city of Shahjahanabad that it became an institution, fuel for porters, builders and soldiers, rich enough to carry a man through a day's labor. From the streets it climbed, as the best dishes do, into the kitchens of the nobility, who could resist neither its depth nor its marrow.

Nalli means the marrow bone, and it is the soul of the pot: shanks simmered until the meat barely clings and the marrow enriches the gravy from within. The old Delhi nihari houses guard a further secret, the taar: a ladle of yesterday's nihari stirred into today's pot, an unbroken thread of flavor said to run back decades. At home we cannot borrow decades. We borrow time instead, and give the pot the whole slow afternoon it asks for.

THE RECIPE

Serves six

Ingredients

- 1 kg mutton shanks with marrow bones (nalli)
- ½ cup ghee · 2 onions, sliced
- 2 tbsp ginger–garlic paste
- Nihari masala, freshly ground: 1 tbsp fennel, 2 tsp coriander seeds, 1 tsp dried ginger (saunth), 4 green and 2 black cardamoms, 6 cloves, 1-inch cinnamon, ½ tsp black peppercorns, a grating of nutmeg and a blade of mace
- 2 tsp Kashmiri chili powder · ½ tsp turmeric · salt
- 3 tbsp whole-wheat flour (atta), dry-roasted, for the slurry
- To finish: julienned ginger, green chilies, coriander leaves, lemon wedges, crisp fried onion

Method

1. In a heavy pot, brown the onions in ghee, add ginger–garlic, then the shanks; sear until the meat takes color.
2. Add the ground nihari masala, chili, turmeric and salt; fry until the ghee separates at the edges.
3. Pour in 8 cups of water. Bring to a boil, then drop to the gentlest simmer, covered, for 3 to 4 hours, until the meat trembles on the bone and the marrow has melted its wealth into the gravy.
4. Whisk the roasted atta with a cup of water and stir it in; simmer 20 minutes more until the gravy turns glossy and coats a spoon.
5. Finish with a small tadka of ghee and chili poured over the surface. Rest half an hour. Serve crowned with ginger, chili, coriander and lemon, with roghani naan alongside.

COURSE THREE · DESSERT

Awadhi Kheer

Milk, rice and patience: the oldest sweetness on the subcontinent

❖



THE HISTORY

Kheer is among the most ancient dishes still on the Indian table. Its name descends from the Sanskrit kshira, milk, and its ancestors were offered in temples long before any court existed to refine it. Refine it the courts did: in Persianate kitchens it met its cousin sheer birinj, and in Awadh it became a study in reduction, milk simmered down until it tastes of caramel without a grain of caramel in it.

The Lucknow of the nawabs loved its milk sweets, and its kitchens prized exactly what this kheer asks for: patience over heat, perfume over sugar, texture over ornament. A breath of kewra, a thread of saffron, a scatter of pistachio. And for the cook alone, the khurchan, the browned scrapings at the bottom of the pot, the oldest private reward in the kitchen.

THE RECIPE

Serves six

Ingredients

- 2 liters full-fat milk
- ⅓ cup short or broken basmati rice, soaked 30 minutes and lightly crushed
- ½ cup sugar, or to taste
- ½ tsp green cardamom powder · a pinch of saffron
- A few drops of kewra water
- 2 tbsp each slivered pistachios and almonds · silver varq, if the evening is grand

Method

1. Bring the milk to a boil in a wide, heavy pot, then lower the flame and simmer, stirring and scraping the sides often, until reduced by a third.
2. Add the crushed rice and cook gently, stirring, for 30–40 minutes, until the grains have melted into the milk and the kheer coats the spoon.
3. Stir in sugar, cardamom and saffron; simmer five minutes more. Take off the heat and add the kewra.
4. Cool, then chill. The kheer thickens as it rests; loosen with a spoon of cold milk if needed. Serve scattered with pistachio and almond, and varq if the evening is grand.

SHUKRIYA

Until the Next Mehfil

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Pehle lazzat, phir sukhan; aur shauq to shām bhar rahega.

CONCEPT, PRODUCTION & CUISINE

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