

## A New Heritage of Mennonite Foods

by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Elsie Ann Kroeker spent much of her career as a cook and baker, so the universal language of good food was a natural connection with the Indian community she came to love.

When guests visited Centenary Bible College the principal would always call on Elsie Ann for cookies. Her birthday cakes "are now famous throughout [the state of] Andhra Pradesh," according to her husband, Werner. Since a typical Indian kitchen was not equipped with an oven, Elsie Ann improvised a new method of cake-baking for an open cooking fire or burner.

She also enjoyed learning Indian cuisine, taking every opportunity to work alongside their household cook. "Chandraleela's status quickly moved from 'cook' to friend," Elsie Ann notes. From Chandraleela, Elsie Ann learned how to grind and mix whole spices to create her friend's signature blend.

Elsie Ann also prepare Indian foods for large gatherings. Soon after arrival in India, she was part of a team making biryani for 75 people at a celebration:

"The boys from the dorm got the fire going early so it could burn down to coals. Some teachers and their wives were the cooks. I helped cut up the chicken because that



After the layers of biryani are in the pot over a fire, coals are placed on the lid. Credit: Elsie Ann Kroeker

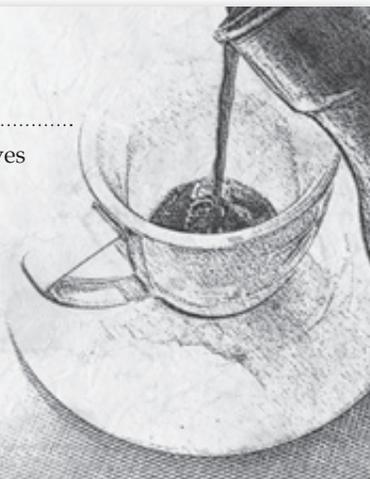
was something I knew how to do. They layered the chicken and rice with garlic, onion, mint and cilantro along with their own masala spice mixture. They put it all in a great big roasting pan and set it on rocks over the fire and put coals on top of a flat lid. We were amazed that it all could be cooked through, but it was delicious!"

Elsie Ann's family cookbook, published for her children in 2010, includes biryani and other Indian recipes in a chapter entitled "Our Family Heritage Foods."

### Masala Chai

(Masala is Hindi for spice; Chai is Hindi for tea.)

In a large stock pot simmer ½ cup black tea leaves in 1 quart of water for 10 minutes. (I use Lamsa tea, but Darjeeling is also good. Any strong, black tea will work.) Add to this 5 sticks of cinnamon, 3-4 cracked cardamom pods, and 4-5 whole cloves. Continue to simmer for 20 more minutes. (More water may be added if needed.) Strain out tea leaves and spices. In a separate pot heat 1 qt. low-fat milk together with 1 cup of sugar. To serve combine both liquids. Serve in demitasse.



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