

# Curry Goat and Calypso

By : **Juggernaut**

Curry Goat is an East Indian dish, blacks love to eat in Trinidad. Calypso is original music invention of Trinidadians along with Steel Band. Curry goat mixed with Calypso, is the real thing in Trinidad and Tobago.



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By

**Subba Rao**

Juggernaut family seldom visited restaurants in town from fear that the restaurants use the same utensils for cooking both the vegetable and meat dishes, though the dishes were served separately. Or the cook may not be a Brahmin or at least a Hindu.

Some restaurants specialized exclusively in meat dishes. These were named military restaurants on the signboard, for example "Aroma Military Restaurant." Perhaps because in army, the military men were served meat, and the message was for general patrons to expect meat dishes in the restaurants. The word non-vegetarian was too sophisticated for common folks then.

On the way to school, Juggernaut walked past a military restaurant on the Main Street but never gathered enough courage to enter because of the fear of being recognized as a Brahmin, as much as he wanted to taste a meat dish. He was not even sure what dish to order--chicken, goat, or lamb.

In his early teens, he visited a nearby town with his family to attend a relative's wedding. While everybody was busy watching the wedding, he slipped quietly onto the main street and wandered around, looking for a military restaurant. The one he found was not fancy, but it would be safe to order the untouchable dish. The restaurant had no menu or any thing like that. A shabby looking man came to his table and almost screamed a list of items to choose from. Confused, Juggernaut ordered the last one the server mentioned, which sounded something like "liver curry." The dish tasted so terrible, he hurriedly left after paying the bill. On reaching the wedding ceremony, he thoroughly washed his mouth several times so that nobody could smell it.

On occasions, young Juggernaut clowned around his paternal grandmother pretending as if eating meat dishes, muttering various animal names. She would close her both ears saying "Rama Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama, Rama" to drown Juggernaut's voice.

In the later years, he moved to the neighboring Province of Orissa for higher education. The last names Panda, Misra, and Acharya are common last names of Brahmins in that region. Juggernaut, coming from a neighboring Province with a last name that gave no clue to the locals to guess his caste, except they knew he was from the South. This anonymous caste status presented him with opportunities to expand his eating habits, particularly trying the forbidden meat.

During the first few days of dining at the college cafeteria, he noticed to his pleasant surprise and delight that some Brahmins in Orissa, unlike many South Indian Brahmins ate meat and fish. His classmate, Vijayanand Misra, a Brahmin, sat next to him on several occasions and ate meat and fish. A few days later, Juggernaut engineered a kind of coupe to overcome his fear and at last ordered goat curry in the college cafeteria when very few students were around. The meat was rubbery and hard to swallow; the taste of the spices was overwhelming. After chewing the meat like a cow ruminates its food, he somehow swallowed it. The dish had more bones and gravy than meat; the restaurants made more money this way. He went back to dormitory with a feeling of excitement for breaking the long-standing tradition.

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In the early seventies, Juggernaut got a fellowship to pursue graduate studies in Trinidad, a small island in the Southern most part of the Caribbean, very close to South America. Very few people in India have heard about Trinidad. Most of his colleagues at the college where he was teaching discouraged him from going there. Some even frightened him of possible drowning along with the whole island after a hurricane since the size of the country appears so small on the map. The people of India are not explorers. For the most part, they were either conquered in their own country or extreme poverty drove some to other parts of the world.

Juggernaut didn't read much about Trinidad before he left hometown. On arrival, he was surprised to find many Indians. These Indians are descended of those that came in late 1800s and early 1900s from India, as agricultural laborers to work in sugarcane fields. They are referred to here as East Indians, perhaps to distinguish them from the few native Carib Indians still living. For the first few months, he boarded at Mrs. Lakhan's home near the University campus. She was an elderly East Indian widow with a large house. Since all her children had left home, she rented out the rooms for the University students. Juggernaut was one of five students at that time occupying the rooms at her house on Jackson Street. She was very kind to him, knowing that he came from her forefather's old country.

On the first day, she served him a minced meat sandwich for lunch. He took a bite and spat out in disgust. It tasted so different from chicken or lamb or goat meat.

“Is something wrong?” Mrs. Lakhan asked.

“I am sorry, the meat tastes different,” he said with little embarrassment.

“Oh my god, you are not a pundit are you?” She closed her mouth with her right hand as if she committed a sin.

“No, I am not a pundit but I am from Brahmin family,” he said, distancing himself from pundits and priests who comply with strict rules of not eating meat at all. He wants to keep his options open to eat chicken, lamb, or goat meat, if opportunity arises.

Mrs. Lakhan was apologetic and explained that her grand parents were Hindus but then converted to Presbyterians as had many Hindus in Trinidad, and they eat beef among other meats.

Mrs. Lakhan and Juggernaut developed a very cordial relationship over the next few months. He learned from her that Indians came to the Island on boats and during several months of travel, some Hindus became Muslims and vice versa as they changed allegiance to their faith depending upon the religious belief of mates they met on the boat. Some lower-caste Hindus changed their last names to upper-caste names. Some even gave themselves Brahmin priestly last names such as Sharma, Sastry, Parsuram, and so on to get privileged and less-strenuous jobs of preaching, conducting marriages and other religious ceremonies.

Belal, one of the boarders at Mrs. Lakhan's house was from Bangla Desh. From day one, Belal was on the move to date local women. Though a Muslim, Belal introduced himself as Lal to pose himself as a Hindu to trick local Hindu girls to get a date. It didn't make any difference. He had a hard time getting dates with Trinidad women of either Indian or African or mixed-race decent. Among other things, he read Bengali poetry to lure them. Trinidad women have little interest in literature of any kind, let alone in poetry. They liked to dance to Calypso music during Carnival and Parang (a kind of Venezuelan Spanish music) during Christmas season.

Belal wanted to move out and rent an apartment for more freedom. One day he came with a proposition Juggernaut couldn't refuse, a two-bedroom apartment at walking distance to the campus. “You bring your girls and I bring mine, and nobody complains about us,” he said.

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Mrs. Lakhan was almost in tears when Juggernaut told about moving out with Belal. But he couldn't resist the offer.

Often, Belal visited Woolworths, a department store near the campus to check out the sales women, particularly, one in the toiletries department. He visited so often, the store manager, a British national, warned Belal not to mess with his staff. Several months after this incident, the store was closed for good either from the curse Belal put on the store or just the mismanagement.

Belal and Juggernaut shared the kitchen, though they cooked separately. Belal cooked goat meat with pungent odor. The smell of coking goat meat bothered Juggernaut at first but he got slowly adjusted. The aroma was so strong; it entrenched into pots and pans in the cupboards in the kitchen permanently.

"A Brahmin like you cooking next to me, while I am chopping meat is something," said Belal on many occasions. Juggernaut didn't mind this at all. As matter of fact, to Belal's surprise, he took a bet and tasted his goat meat curry. This was the beginning of a long gastronomical expedition, from eating vegetable dishes to goat meat. Juggernaut stumbled into a great recipe for cooking goat meat with a mixture of Indian spices or curry powder. News spread in on the campus that Juggernaut was an expert on curry goat. The staff and students gave him the nickname "curry goat."

During the Christmas dance party at the campus, Belal went wild, almost pulling women from their chairs to dance with him. Most obliged, but when he tried slow and dirty dance, they found a reason to avoid him altogether. On the whole, he declared it was a success and waited for the telephone to ring. Then he told me that the women were playing hard to get. He started using local slang like "liming" for hanging out. He learned how to make a pass at women by making a hissing sound, a kind of whistling. He said he was busy "tackling" women, an expression for checking out women. Often he said, he was "scrunting" for women, a local slang for deprecation. The best Juggernaut could do was to console him and give some encouragement to attend fetes or dance parties with loud calypso or steel band music. At fetes, one can virtually pick up any Indian, Black, or Dougla (mixed race) women for dancing without any fuss. Juggernaut accompanied Belal to some fetes on and off campus. The minute Belal started dancing, the woman with whom he was dancing somehow disappeared into the crowd, leaving Belal alone.

Belal's favorite drink was coke and "Old Oak," local rum, or "Carib," a local beer. He sipped and then chewed, making loud sounds to feel the after taste. He never became disoriented even after several drinks. He kept drinking with a mischievous smile and tried to jump to the music, throwing his hands up into the air to mingle with local crowd, but still he stood apart.

"Belal, you should first practice dancing for calypso at home, then at the fetes, you can impress the women with your fancy footwork," advised juggernaut.

Both visited a nearby market in Tunapuna, an area close the campus and bought calypso music. Most lyrics were hard to understand but when they did, it was all about lovemaking. Belal practiced by jumping to the tunes, and eventually abandoned the jackass act altogether and declared that Bengalis (people originally from the Province of Bengal in India) like him were good in writing poetry and cooking fish. Trinidad turned Belal into a weekend drunk and Juggernaut into an expert in cooking curry goat. At last Juggernaut put his Brahmin natural cooking skills into practice, though not with ingredients appreciated in his family back home.

Several months after moving into their own apartment, Belal still had a hard time cajoling women to visit. Most women suspected his ulterior motives instantly on the very first date with him. At last, they came out with an idea of throwing a fete in their apartment as a final salvo. They invited couples and single women only, but they brought their own friends as well. In Trinidad, if you invite one, you invite all. People jumped to the Calypso music and made slow dancing to melodies. For Juggernaut dancing was a spectator sport so he

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kept himself busy in dishing out curry goat and steamed rice. The blacks went crazy for his food. An attractive black woman pulled him from the table and danced in a slow motion. He held her delicately, under the watchful eyes of her husband with a physique of a wrestler, while she squeezed Juggernaut tight from top to bottom, whispering into his ears how much she liked his curry goat. He felt her body shaped like a South Indian Temple carving. After the dance, Belal came up to him, gave a big sigh, rolled his eyes, and went back to crowd, dancing with his hands up in air, Trinidad style. During the party, Belal tried hard to lure women into his bedroom without any success.

The next morning, Juggernaut woke up to the soft knock on the apartment door. It was the shapely black woman he danced with the evening before. She entered the apartment with a smile. Walking around quietly in the room, she said she was in the area and dropped by for a chat. Juggernaut was still in his nightclothes, making plans to cleanup the place. He thought she came for the left over curry goat, she said she loved so much. After standing a few minutes, looking straight into his eyes, she said, "you cow," and rushed out of the apartment. His inaction could be a blessing in disguise, considering her husband with a physique of Bhima, a character in Hindu mythology known for wrestling and culinary skills. A famous dish, Nalla Bhima Paka was named after him. Juggernaut thought that he has nothing in common or any thing close to Bhima's abilities including cooking. He has no clue what this black woman saw in him except the curry goat he cooked.

Belal was turned down by every woman he tackled. One day, he said he was moving out to rent a one-bed room apartment for himself for more freedom and opportunities to lure women. He said Juggernaut lured women away from him with his curry goat.

After years of scrunting for women, he stopped making hissing sounds to tease women and his scrunting took a dive at last.

Eventually, Belal gave up calypso dancing and settled for a wife from Bangla Desh, a religious woman interested in poetry and cooking fish.

Juggernaut's own interest in eating meat lessened as years went by and the dish "curry goat" only brought back memories of slow dancing with the black woman in Trinidad.

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