

Burger dosa: Not so buntastic?

Unmentionable things have been stuffed into the dosa over the years, so why the outrage over its McAvatar?

Geeta Doctor

*McD made a mash of milagu mayo
Packed a pickled potato patty
Dosa's done and dusted
It's McBreakfast's Taste of India Challenge.*

Across the South, the Dosa Masters have raised their ladles in silence. On January the 13th, the alien hordes led by one well-known multinational company unleashed the challenge of the dosa burger.

Just as the Brits took the pepper, or milagu from the fiery Tamil milagu-tani into their watery soups and made it Mulligatawny, the Dosa Mcburger has taken the milagu from the traditional pepper powders and added it to a mayonnaise base and piped it onto a potato patty to create a taste of a masala dosa. The outer case is made of a soft French-style brioche.

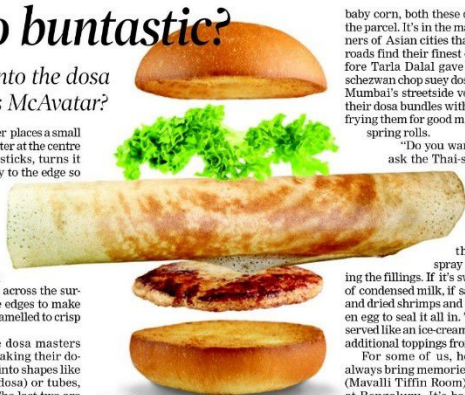
Dosa Masters are the samurais of South Indian breakfast foods. They are alchemists who transform the frothing fermented batter of rice and lentils into golden discs that go by the name of dosa.

"It is wrong to call them crepes, or pancakes," says one Dosa Master. "It suggests that dosas are just something to wrap around other ingredients. It's much more than a

wrap." A seasoned dosa maker places a small amount of the fermented batter at the centre of a hot tawa and before it sticks, turns it around in circles all the way to the edge so that it forms a perfect circle. The swirls, when well made, resemble the outward spirals of a tightly wound fern leaf, or a spiral galaxy unfolding its gaseous arms. At this stage they do an abhishekam, a ritual splash of melted ghee or oil across the surface, while gently lifting the edges to make certain that the outside is enamelled to crisp golden perfection.

This is where new-age dosa masters pander to the market, by making their dosas crisp enough to fashion into shapes like the Topi Dosa (dunce cap dosa) or tubes, triangles and half-moons. The last two are ideal for making masala dosas, or those that include a lining of coconut chutney perhaps, or a mild spicy potato and onion mix, that in the Mangalore region goes by the name of sagu.

As traditional dosa makers know, the mix of rice and lentil, or starch and protein, with the addition of a tiny amount of fenugreek seeds, when ground to a soft grainy consistency and allowed to ferment, makes it a per-



TOI Imaging

fect combination of nutrients. This is true even when homemakers these days add quinoa, ragi, semolina, oats, or millet, to make the batter more nutritionally interesting. Semolina and wheat dosas are old variants.

There have been experiments with all manner of newer fillings. For instance, you can have cheese dosas, or mince chicken dosas, or for those who fancy broccoli and

baby corn, both these diced and sliced into the parcel. It's in the markets and street corners of Asian cities that the culinary crossroads find their finest expression. Long before Tarla Dalal gave her blessing to the schetzwan chop suey dosa filled with noodles, Mumbai's streetside vendors were stuffing their dosa bundles with illicit left-overs and frying them for good measure to create dosa spring rolls.

"Do you want it sweet or salty?" ask the Thai-style dosa makers at

Bangkok's Chatuchak market. They use a triangular blade with a short handle to create an even disc of the rice batter and spray it with oil before adding the fillings. If it's sweet, it gets a lashing of condensed milk, if salty then egg noodles and dried shrimps and a quick glaze of beaten egg to seal it all in. The Thai egg dosa is served like an ice-cream in a paper cone with additional toppings from a squeeze bottle.

For some of us, however, a dosa will always bring memories of the fabled MTR, (Mavalli Tiffin Room) dosa near Lalbaug at Bengaluru. It's been called the headquarters of dosa making. Once you've tasted an MTR dosa, crisp on the outside, spongy-soft inside, a tiny sliver of banana leaf with ghee nestled in its folds, potato filling diced small, with a helping of the green coriander chutney, you know that all the rest are imposters.

One thing's for sure, with French brioche meeting South Indian dosa at McDonald's, the taste of India is about to change.