

Spicing Up Life: The Cultural Significance and Regional Varieties of Chillies in India

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SUMMARY

India, a country noted for its extensive culinary traditions, has a stunning array of chili peppers that give its food more complexity, flavor, and spice. India is the most popular country in the world for producing chillies because of its enormous potential to produce and export different types of chillies that are needed for different markets around the world's intensive cultivation practices, to include the best suited climate, soil, irrigation facilities, skill, and varieties. Not just a spice in Indian cooking, but a way of life, chillies are the brilliant red jewels.

INTRODUCTION

Chilli (*Capsicum* species), a well-known crop of New World origin, is cultivated for its fruits valued for colour, flavour, spice, vegetable and nutrition that it provides to the several food items (Kumar et al., 2006). Of the five species of the genus *Capsicum* that are grown around the world, *C. annum* is the one that is most frequently grown for its pungent fruits, such as chilli (also known as hot pepper, American pepper, Chile, azi, cayenne, paprika, etc.), or its non-pungent fruits, such as sweet pepper (also known as capsicum, paprika, bell pepper, Shimla mirch). Fruits can be pickled, used as seasonings, and as vegetables. They are used to add pungency, color, and flavor. Dried chillies are used to make pickles, sauces, soups, salad dressings, and curry paste and powder. Capsaicin is a useful ingredient in many pharmaceutical preparations and ointments for conditions including colds, sore throats, asthma, chest congestion, headaches, arthritis, and others. It also has good medicinal properties and export potentialities. Vitamins A, C, and E are abundant in chillies. Chillies are an integral part of Indian cuisine, adding not just heat but also depth of flavor to dishes. India boasts a rich diversity of chilli varieties, each with its unique characteristics, flavors, and levels of spiciness. From the mild and aromatic Kashmiri chilli to the explosively hot Bhut Jolokia, let's embark on a journey through the vibrant spectrum of chillies that grace Indian kitchens.



Byadagi Chilli:



Lavangi Chilli:



Teja Chilli:



Bhoot Jolokia:



Kanthari Chillies



Bhavnagari Chilli:



Dhalle Khursani Chilli:



Guntur Chilli:



Kashmiri Chilli:



Mundu Chilli:



Boriya Chilli:



Sankeshwari Chilli:



Mathiana Chilli:



Khola Chilli:



Chatpata Chilli:

Byadagi Chilli: Byadagi Chilli, Bedgi Mirchi, is a popular variety of chili pepper cultivated in Karnataka. Because of its distinctive features it is being used in various culinary applications, including spice blends, curries, and pickles. It is a long (12-15 cm) wrinkled fruit with 80-130 ASTA colour units, capsaicin content ranging from 0.8 to 1.3 percent, pungency ranges from 8000 to 15000 SHU (Scoville Heat Units). It is often used as a substitute for paprika in global markets. It has got Geographical Indication (GI) status in 2011

Lavangi Chilli: Lavangi Chillies are thin, long, dark green chillies, also called Kolhapuri lavangi mirchi in Maharashtra. Lavangi chilli is considered a medium-hot chilli but it has an intense flavour. It has a SHU of about 30,000-50,000. It even adds a unique aroma to the dishes cooked using this. Mature chilli pods are powdered to make hot Kolhapuri masala.

Teja Chilli: It is primarily cultivated in India, particularly in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Capsaicin measured in Scoville Heat Units (SHU) for S17 TEJA chilli is in the range of 60,000 to 110,000 SHU, colour units of 50 to 70 ASTA. Teja chilli is thin skinned fruit with 5-9 cm in length, 0.8-1.3 cm in breadth and high in seed content. Teja chilli is renowned for its high spiciness and is considered one of the hottest chili peppers in the world.

Bhoot Jolokia: Bhoot jolokia is the hottest chilli pepper in the world. It is so hot it is called as Ghost pepper, King chilli and Naga jolokia. The ghost pepper originates from North East India and is a major part of the Naga and Assamese cuisine. Bhut means ghost in Assamese and hence the name 'ghost pepper'. It measures 1,041,427 SHU.

Kanthari Chillies, or Bird's Eye Chillies: Kanthari Chilli is grown in Kerala & some parts of Tamil Nadu in India. Fruits are elongate, typically upright, typically small and narrow, up to 5 cm x 1 cm, and are smooth and exceedingly smelly. It can be used in curries and have medicinal properties i.e. lowering blood pressure, cholesterol, and other cardiac conditions. It measures 50,000- 1lakh SHU.

Bhavnagari Chilli: All year availability, grown in bhavnagr in Gujarat. These are **long chilli** plants producing a good yields of 13cm long hot peppers. Peppers are very hot and turn from green to red when mature. It measures 30,000- 50,000 SHU

Dhale Khursani Chilli: Considered as one of the world's hottest chillies, literally translates to 'round chillies' in Nepali, owing to its physical attributes. It is primarily cultivated in Nepal, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal. In 2020, Indian state of Sikkim received a Geographic Indication (GI) tag for the pepper. It has a range of 1,00,000 to 3,50,000 SHU (Scoville Heat Units). The chilli is used in local food preparations, particularly with momos. It is known for its medical properties, too

Guntur Chilli: This is predominantly grown in Guntur, khammam, prakasam districts of Andhra Pradesh in India. Guntur Sannam Chilli has been conferred with the Geographical Indication (GI) status in 2010. They are long fruits (5 to 15 cm in length) and diameter range from 0.5 to 1.5 cm. Rich in Vitamin C and Protein. dry chilli has rich red color and hot flavour. The fertile soil and guntur mirchi market nearby led to popularity of this variety world wide. Widely known as S4 Sannam Chilli, this is one of the popular variety for international buyers. The skin of S4 Sannam variety is thick in nature and red in color. Color Value: 30 – 35, Pungency: 35,000 - 40,000 SHU, Capsaicin Percentage: 0.226 %

Kashmiri Chilli: Kashmiri Red Chillies or Kashmiri Laal Mirch are characterized by their ability to give a dark red colour to food, capable of colouring and adding flavor. The colour value is 54.10. The capsaicine value is

0.325%. They are mild, reading 1000 – 2000 SHU on the Scoville Scale. Due to the high demand for Kashmiri chilis, substitutes such as Byadagi chillies.

Mundu Chilli: Length of 2 to 4 cm dark reddish shiny and thick skin fruits. It has SHU between 30,000 – 50,000 SHU

Boriya Chilli: Large round, bright or dark red in colour when dried turns into translucent dark brown colour and seeds rattle inside used in curries and salsa sauce. It has SHU of 8 lakh to 10 lakh

Sankeshwari Chilli: Sankeshwari pepper comes from a place called Sankeshwar in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. It is widely used in Maharashtra cuisine, especially coastal cuisine. It is also a spicy chilli, often mixed with dried masala to make traditional garam masala powder. It can be used as a substitute for expensive masalas in dishes. It is bright orange color chili. *Being high in potassium*, it may improve blood circulation in the body.

Mathiana Chilli: The dry, hot climate of Rajasthan makes it ideal for chilli cultivation. Mathania produces one of the finest varieties of red chillies (lal mirch) in India, known for its sharp pungent heat; it brings distinct flavour, colour and taste to food and is used in preparation of famous Rajasthani dishes like Laal Maas (red meat) and Ker Sangri. SHU 50,000 – 70,000

Khola Chilli: Khola chilli is a famous variety of chilli grown on the hill slopes of Canacona, located in the district of South Goa. Named after the village of Khola where it is exclusively grown, the chilli is known for its distinctive taste and colour. Khola chillies are attractive brilliant red and long. It is moderately pungent. The skin of the chillies is thick, hence there is a reduced chance of breakage, giving the chilli a longer shelf-life. Its length is approximately 5.6 to 7.4 cm, diameter is 1.2 to 1.4 cm. Chilli powder added to food recipes lends an attractive red colour to the dish. SHU 17,100

Chatpata Chilli: Chapata chilli is one of the Sweetest Chilli of Indian Origin and could be one of the sweetest chilli in the world. Chapata chilli have a unique sweet fragrance and rich taste, it has rich deep red colour pods. The heat value between 4000 SHU to 6000 SHU.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the rich tapestry of chili peppers in India exemplifies the country's culinary diversity and cultural heritage. Each chilli adds its own unique flavor and character to dishes across the nation. As integral ingredients in everyday cooking, religious rituals, and traditional remedies, chillies continue to play a vital role in shaping the gastronomic landscape and societal fabric of India. Through their myriad shapes, colors, and spiciness levels, chillies not only tantalize the taste buds but also serve as a symbol of India's vibrant culinary tradition, inviting exploration, appreciation, and celebration.

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