

THE BATTLE OF BUTTER CHICKEN: HOW A CULINARY CREATION BECAME A LEGAL CONTROVERSY

Among the vast number of bustling cases weighing the Hon'ble Delhi High Court, an unexpected case has captured the attention of both legal enthusiasts and food aficionados alike. This case revolves around a quintessential dish of Indian Cuisine, the Butter Chicken. The case is based on a contentious debate over its origins, sparking a legal battle to determine its true founder.

Butter Chicken, known for its rich, creamy texture has long been a staple in Indian restaurants worldwide. Its creation is often attributed to the renowned Moti Magal restaurant in Delhi during the mid-20th Century. However, recent claims have challenged this narrative, asserting that the dish's origins lie elsewhere. The legal battle began when two prominent restaurants, Moti Mahal and Daryaganj, found themselves embroiled in a bitter dispute over the rightful ownership of the Butter Chicken's formative recipe. Moti Mahal, tracing its roots to the pre-independence era, has long been celebrated as the birthplace of this iconic dish. Conversely, the rival chain of restaurants, Daryaganj, has asserted themselves as the inventors of Butter Chicken and Dal Makhani, and further trademarked this claim. Daryaganj was founded in 2019 by the grandson of Mr. Kundan Lal Jaggi, who was one of the original partners of the original Moti Mahal restaurant.



Beyond the culinary realm, the outcome of this legal battle holds broader implications for intellectual property rights and the recognition of culinary innovations. A similar instance of such contravening claims in the recent past was when the eastern states of Odisha and West Bengal wherein both States claimed to have invented the dessert, rasgulla. This was finally resolved by the Geographical Indication (GI) Authorities in 2018 where the accreditation for the same was granted to the State of West Bengal. Apart from the legal intricacies, this case has captured the imagination of the public, igniting discussions about culinary heritage and the evolution of Indian cuisine. This spark mentions other significant people who had contributed to this process and a possibility that this recipe may have originated in Peshawar before independence, where the founders of the original restaurant trace their origins.

However, it is an undeniable fact that the Delhi High Court's decision in this case will set a significant precedent for future disputes over culinary ownership and heritage, which has kept all those interested in the realm of intellectual property, deeply vested in this case.

Moti Mahal asserts that the recipe was first conceptualized by its founder Mr. Kundan Lal Gujral who was one of the original restaurant's founders. As per their narrative, the dish was born out of a creative endeavour to transform leftover tandoori chicken into a delectable new creation. Moti Mahal's longstanding reputation and historical presence in Delhi's culinary landscape lend credence to their claim as the progenitors of Butter Chicken. Due to this strong claim of theirs, they have initiated legal proceedings against Daryaganj's trademarked claim of being the inventors of Butter Chicken. Opposing this suit, Daryaganj, although being a relatively newcomer to the culinary scene is no less fervent in their assertion as they claim that Mr. Kundan Lal Jaggi played a pivotal role in innovating the recipe.