

Hindi transcript:

मैंने कई लोगों को बोलते सुना है कि simple is good, और इस बात को मैं भी कुछ हद तक मानती हूँ। लेकिन मुझे उस ग्रीक सहेली की बात भी याद आती है, जिसने मुँह में पान रखते ही कहा था कि "There's an explosion of flavor in the mouth।" ...तो, तब मुझे बड़ा अजीब-सा लगा था। मैंने कहा था कि "भई पान तो पान होता है, तुम्हें इसमें क्या ऐसा दिख गया, ज़रा हमें भी बताओ।" तो उसने कहा कि "नहीं इसका स्वाद जो है, बहुत कॉम्प्लेक्स है।" और मुझे लगता है कि यह हमारे खाने की एक खासियत है कि हर चीज़ में स्वाद जैसे भरा पड़ा है। और फिर हमारे खाने में स्वादों के समुलन पर बड़ा ज़ोर दिया जाता है। तो जैसे बंगाली खाने में आप नमक ढालते हैं, और साथ में थोड़ी चीनी भी ढालते हैं। ...कई dishes ऐसे हैं बंगाली खाने में जिसमें आपको ऐसा करना पड़ता है।

एक और दिलचस्प बात हमारे खाने के बारे में यह है कि... बहुत बड़ा देश है हमारा, बहुत सारी परंपराओं का मिलन हुआ है वहाँ पर। यही कुछ दिनों पहले में टीपु सुल्तान के रसोई के बारे में कोई बेकार सी magazine article पढ़ रही थी। तो उसमें बताया गया था कि कुछ...कुछ French chefs involved थे टीपु सुल्तान के दस्तरख्वान को reconstruct करने में। क्योंकि टीपु के पिता जो थे, हैदर अली ...उन्होंने तो फ़्रांसीसियों से युद्ध कला सीखी, और उसके साथ उनका खाना भी अपनी रसोई में बनवा ढाला! तो इस तरह से विभिन्न परंपराओं का मिलन हमारे खाने में हुआ है। वैसे मैंने मैसूर या हैदराबाद का मश...मशहूर खाना नहीं खाया है। लेकिन कहते हैं कि वहाँ पर उत्तर और दक्षिण के खाने का सही मिलन हुआ था।

जैसे हमारे घर में काफ़ी अजीब खाना बनता है। हमलोग बनारस के बंगाली हैं, तो कभी निमोना बनाते हैं तो कभी मछली। निमोना यानी कि पिसे हुए मटर की सब्ज़ी। फिर जब मेरी दीदी गुजरात में रहती थी तब हमारी अचार की अलमारी में छुट्टा हुआ करता था, नाश्ते में फरसाण होता था। जब महाराष्ट्र से घर वापस आती थी, तब माँ-पिताजी को जवार की भाखरी और अमटी बनाकर खिलाती थी। और फिर मेरे विलायती खाने के experiments चलते रहते थे। वैसे मेरा favorite menu in the world है 'कॉलाई-एर-ढाल, पोस्तो बाटा आर माछेर टौक' – यानी कि चावल के साथ उरद की दाल, पिसा हुआ खस-खस, और खट्टी-मीठी मछली। बंगाल के बर्दवान जिले का खाना है यह। जिस दिन अमरीका से मैं घर पहुँचती हूँ, उस दिन दोपहर को यही खाने में बनता है। और रात को भूख रही तो फिर इली, साब्रार, सूखी चटनी, गीली चटनी, और घी।

English translation:

I have heard many people say that simple is good, and I also agree with this statement to some extent. But I also remember my Greek friend, who, as soon as she put a *paan* (a half or whole betel leaf filled with lime, arecanut, and other tasty things – *paan* is really a rather addictive digestive) into her mouth, said, “There’s an explosion of flavor in the mouth.” So, at that time I had found [her remark] really strange. I had said, “well, *paan* is plain old *paan*; what do you find [so special about] it? Do tell us.” So she said, “No, this has a very complex taste.” And I think that one of the special things about our food is that it’s as if everything is full of flavor. And also, a lot of attention is given to the balance of flavors in our food (cooking). For instance, in Bengali food you add salt, but with it, you also add a bit of sugar. There are many dishes in Bengali cuisine in which you have to do this.

Another interesting thing about our food is that ... ours is a very big country; it manifests the blending of many different traditions. Just a few days back that I was reading a useless (speaker means silly) magazine article about Tipu Sultan’s* kitchen. So it mentioned (speaker says ‘it was mentioned there’) that some ... some French chefs were involved in the reconstruction of Tipu Sultan’s [table] (दस्तरख्वान is the cloth on which food is served in a Muslim household). Since his father Haider Ali ... he learned the art of war from the French and along with that, he also got their food made his kitchen! So in this way our food manifests the blending of different [culinary] traditions. I have not yet tasted the famous cuisine of Mysore or Hyderabad, but it is said that in those places there occurred a perfect blending of Northern and Southern Indian cuisines.

The food prepared in our home is quite strange. We are Bengalis from Banaras, so sometimes we make *nimona*, and sometimes fish. *Nimona* meaning a curry made from a (roughly) ground peas. (This is a dish typical of eastern Uttar Pradesh.) Then, when my sister used to live in Gujarat, our pickle closet would contain *chhunda* (a sweet and sour pickle made from raw mangos); we had *farsaan* (a general term for several savory snacks eaten for breakfast in Gujarati households) for breakfast. When I returned home from Maharashtra (where the speaker went to school) I used to make *jowar ki bhakri* (chapatti made out of sorghum flour) and *amti* (a somewhat sweet dal, or curried lentils prepared in Maharashtrian households) for my parents. And then my experiments with food from other countries (विलायती just means English – and by extension, foreign!) would go on. But my favorite menu in the world is *kolai-er-dal, posto bata ar machher tak* (speaker says this in Bengali) that is, curried urad lentils with rice, ground poppy seeds and sweet and sour fish. This is food from the Burdwan district in Bengal. The day I reach home from the U.S., these dishes are prepared for afternoon lunch. And if we still feel hungry at dinner time, then [we might eat] *idli, sambar, dry chutney, moist chutney and ghee*.**

*Tipu Sultan was the ruler of Mysore in southern India between 1782 and 1799. He is renowned most of all for his military genius and patriotism. He was also known to be a humane ruler who made life easier for the peasantry, patronized the arts, and hired good chefs!! Tipu died defending his capital city against the British in the fourth Anglo-Mysore war.

****These are all southern, or TAMILIAN dishes: fluffy rice and urad dal cakes, a sour dal cooked with tamarind and vegetables, chutney made with dried and ground spices, chutney made with coconut, ginger and green chilis, and ghee poured over the hot cakes and everything else – this is what they must eat in paradise!**

About CultureTalk: CultureTalk is produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and housed on the LangMedia Website. The project provides students of language and culture with samples of people talking about their lives in the languages they use everyday. The participants in CultureTalk interviews and discussions are of many different ages and walks of life. They are free to express themselves as they wish. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants. Inclusion in CultureTalk does not represent endorsement of these ideas or opinions by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, Five Colleges, Incorporated, or any of its member institutions: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

© 2003-2008 Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and Five Colleges, Incorporated