

## Master chef frees Indian cuisine of grease

Indian food has never been lighter. Imagine a full-course 'desi' meal without a drop of oil. For palates bred on lard and dollops of fatty cooking oil, the idea of food that has not been sauteed or lightly fried seems a tad strange.

But master chef Sitangsu Chakravarty has pulled off a miracle. His latest cook book, 'No Added Fat: Recipes Redefining Indian Cuisine', lists 81 recipes - vegetarian, non-vegetarian and desserts - that have done away with oil from the list of ingredients.

The book was launched by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit at The Park Hotel Monday evening where chef Baksheesh Din of The Park, a friend of the author, dished out some of the recipes from the book.

On offer was a light vegetable salad of shredded cabbage, carrot, radish, onion, bean sprouts and roasted peanuts in a dressing of ground mustard, an assortment of light chicken dishes cooked without oil and green bananas in white gravy. The spices used for the delicately flavoured curry were roasted.

'It is a great option to look at. Just before the launch, Sitangsu wanted to know the menu for the evening. Why not some light snacks, he suggested. I told him that I would rustle up some of the recipes from his book for everyone to sample,' Baksheesh said.

The book, a glossy hard cover volume published by Pearson Education, with an attractive layout and mouth-watering photographs, is divided into seven sections. It begins with soups, starters and chutneys followed by sections on fish, shellfish, chicken, lamb, vegetables, rice, bread and a smart spread of easy-to-make desserts. It rounds off with a glossary of spices and basic information about weights and measures.

'The main idea behind the book was to make Indian recipes lighter and internationalise them. When I was abroad, travelling around the globe, I realised that the profile of Indian cuisine was not as glamorous as its counterparts. It was because of the excess of oil and grease left on the plate. I started thinking about how to remove the heaviness and grease from Indian food and I started looking for a new medium to cook. And the seeds of the book were sown,' master chef Sitangsu, as he is known, told IANS.

The recipes, says the chef, takes off on the premise that instead of lightly frying the spices in oil to pass the flavour on to the products being cooked, as is the trend in most Indian homes and hotels, they are roasted and pounded. The flavours are then allowed to infuse into the vegetables, meat or fish by stirring or mixing.

The recipes are gravy based and the natural fat of the ingredients used provides the oil content. Cooking in oil takes away 30 percent of the flavour, which go away with the grease on the plate. 'We usually discard the grease that floats on the plate. Oil is a waste of time, energy and money,' he said.

The recipes according to chef Baksheesh are successful because they are easy to translate into dishes. 'I did not have to struggle with them unlike recipes in several other cookbooks,' he said.

Master chef Sitangsu is a popular face on Indian television. He appears for the channel CNBC's 'Good Life' show. He has another cookbook to his credit, 'India: The Choicest Regional Recipes'. A graduate of the Institute of Hotel Management, Pusa, he has an advance diploma in cookery from the Culinary Institute of America in New York.

In his career spanning three decades, chef Sitangsu has promoted Indian food through innovative recipes the world over. His kitchen experience includes long tenures at the ITDC and The Taj groups of hotels.

Addressing the gathering, chief guest Naresh Trehan, a noted cardio-vascular surgeon, said such books were welcome at a time when 12 percent of Indians were slated to suffer from heart diseases.

'We do not have enough money, hospitals and doctors to treat patients with cardio-vascular disorders or arterial diseases. It is better to advise patients to cook the oil-free food than prescribe health regimens that get boring after a point of time. Most people slip back to their old ways.'

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