

Food of home

The sun is up, at a thirty five degree elevation from the ground, shining proudly as always, seemingly because it is aware that thy majesty is a life giver. It is breakfast time, and something is in the making. I am dawdling towards the kitchen, though the growling stomach is making me want to run like a man runs when a mad dog is chasing him, to reach the kitchen, but I want the anticipation and excitement to build up so when I learn what's cooking it brings me maximum pleasure and widest grin on my face, besides I love to guess, so I am guessing what's it going to be, could it be the ancient parathas with tangy and spicy achhars of different kinds “ahaaa”, or could it be the common sunny poha with crunchy peanuts and crispy curry leaves and tiny cubes of sugar “yummm”, or could it be cube shaped idli with those cute round tiny black mustard seeds with my favourite coconut chilli chutney made with a day old curd which gives it a tangy flavour and smell which tickles my nose, “oomph”, or could it be the good old absolutely mind boggling maggi!!! “yuhoooo”. “Darn it”, I said to myself, gulping the tsunami of saliva this guessing game, which I believe is a cherished part of every child growing up, brought into my mouth, “there is no trace of any smell, from which I can possibly figure out”.

I am approaching the kitchen and I can hear all sorts of sounds, the heavy grinding noise of ‘*silbatta*’, the ‘*slit- slit*’ of something being chopped, the ‘*kuttt*’ sound probably of a cutter cutting tobacco. As my foot enters the kitchen I am bombarded with a plethora of information. There is ‘*chai*’ boiling on low flame extracting out all the juice from the ‘*elaichi*’ and ‘*tulsi*’ leaves giving away a smell which rejuvenates your senses. In one corner is sitting *jiji* half crossed legged cutting up tobacco into small bits, on the other corner, a few feet away, is sitting my father processing the fruits, slicing those shiny red apples, plucking the parrot green grapes from its cluster, peeling the bright orange oranges and separating the slices, to be served to all of us. In another part is my aunt who is making ginger-garlic paste on *silbatta*, and “wow”, how grand that smell is. My mother chopping

up onions and chillies on the kitchen top, I ask “what’s in the breakfast”, “poha” comes the reply, and again the tsunami starts raging in my mouth. In fifteen minutes time the poha gets ready, I take my plate, and sit on the squiggly wooden bench outside the kitchen in veranda open to sky and light, relishing my soft puffy poha with the crunch and crisp of salty peanuts and curry leaves and a tinge of sweetness coming in once in a while of the added sugar. It is a joyous and peaceful moment as I am looking at my sisters and cousins enjoying their poha sitting on the floor, staring at others plate as their own is getting exhausted, and then as expected, trade proposals start, “Ansu didi, I will do whatever you say if you give me this much.” “Oh really.” And there comes the evil grin on her face, “ you have to massage my head for ten minutes”, just about the deal is about to close I jump in, “wait I haven’t placed my bet, I’ll give you ten rupees for the same amount,” “huh, ten rupees against ten minute head massage, no way”, “ okay fifteen rupees” , “shut up, its still low”, I try to persuade her, “ you can buy your dear masala kurkure and five delicious kacchha aam toffees, just imagine you fool, it is so much”, “ok done”, and that’s how you strike a deal.

The sun is now seventy degrees from the ground, my mother calls me to pluck some ladyfinger from the backyard and yet again the tsunami hits the coast of my mouth. The backyard is situated beside the veranda and can be accessed through a metal door. It is home to many vegetables, at this time these were growing in the backyard-the lush green coriander, hanging upside down bottle gourds, bitter bitter gourd, round shy pumpkins hiding behind their large leaves, quiet lemons hanging from the tree, tall lady though quite itchy ladyfinger, fluttering and smiling spinach, underworld gangster trio radish, carrot and beetroot, white dude cauliflower and his green conservative brother cabbage. I enter the yard and walk towards the ladyfinger plants growing as high as my height, I hold the ladyfingers from their head end and snap them, they easily break off. After I have collected enough I go back and throw them in a bucket of water, give them a good ride in the water and drop them in a basket, keep it in the kitchen.

My mother starts preparing the usual raita by mixing the water in curd stirring it and adding along turmeric and some dried mint powder till

everything becomes one, then she goes on to prepare the tadka, she takes a very tiny bowl, put it on flame, pour some ghee, when it starts to smoke a little, she throws in jeera and hing wait for a few seconds and dip it in the raita, causing a tower of flame to come out, I never came to know the science behind that. She now takes a cooker to cook the *toor* or yellow dal, and the formula for accurately measuring the quantity of dal required is two handful of dal for adults and one handful for kids and the level of water being one inch above the dal, she puts the sufficient amount of dal in cooker with water and leaves it on medium flame to cook. My aunt starts chopping the ladyfinger in small lengths while mother is chopping onion, chillies, garlic, ginger and tomatoes. Once this is done she puts a kadhai or cauldron on flame she then gently pour some oil into the kadhai, after the oil becomes hot, she slides some chopped jeera, hing and then garlic and chopped ginger, later onions and chillies follow, they are fried till they become golden brown, then she puts two to three tablespoons coriander powder, one tablespoon red chilly powder and then she throws in the chopped ladyfingers, rolls them over so that the masala gets evenly mixed and then comes the salt, she then covers it with a lid for it to cook and in ten minutes the 'subji' is ready. In the same manner, another kadhai is taken ghee is poured into it with jeera and hing and then chopped onions, chillies and tomatoes are fried for some time and dal is poured into it. My aunt prepares the roti and rice. I prepare the salad with usually cucumber and onion going into it and occasionally tomatoes.

After the meal gets prepared, everyone is served and I, my mother, sister and father eat at the last. We eat on the veranda floor. There is something about eating on the floor that you do not get sitting on a chair. I lay down the mats while others bring the plates, kadhais and everything else. My mother and I eat in a *thali* or plate while sister and father form the other pair. We serve food in our thalis, the dal goes in the largest section, the ladyfinger subji goes in the other, then comes the roti and achar in the remaining two, raita is poured in a bowl and salad has a common plate, rice is taken later. Two thalis, four bowls, and one plate, the sunlight enhancing its colours, increasing its aura and flavour, and lo! what a sight to behold

that is! Eating with your loved ones, appreciating the food and the work that has gone into it, the pleasure is indescribable.

There is something about home food, it captures a feeling which food from anywhere else doesn't satisfy, it is pure, it satisfies the soul.