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My Best Food Experience

Every year, in the month of September or October, Dashain is widely celebrated in Nepal, which is the longest and the most auspicious festival of all Nepalese. Celebrated for a fortnight, the first nine days of the festival symbolize the battle that took place between goddess Durga and an evil-spirited demon named Mahisasura, who spread horror and terror in the entire world. The tenth day is the day when Durga won the fight against him. In short, the festival signifies unity, victory of truth over evil and the inception of happiness. The festival starts on Shukla Paksha, the bright lunar fortnight of the month and ends on Purnima, the full moon. Food is an intrinsic part of this festival; from how it is prepared, to the smell of the various spices, and the beautiful arrangement of each dish, and of course, the amazing taste of our Nepali food. Starting from the 7th day, families organize feasts, play cards, and make merry until the 15th day of Dashain and several types of meat are consumed.

Popularly known as Bijaya Dashami, it was an early morning of the tenth and the most awaited day of Dashain. My dad, my mom, my sister, and me; we were all heading towards our grandparents' house. The house my grandparents owned lied on the outskirts of town which was made of mud, bricks, and huge pieces of logs by their ancestors about 100 years ago. A sense of pride is felt when we go into this old house as our ancestors and grandparents have been protecting this house for such an extremely long time. The bright cloudless day, chirping of the

birds, grandparents' ancient mud house, the warmth of the sun in the front yard and the earthy smell from the woods nearby; I was cherishing it all. Our whole family was together, and everyone was wearing their favorite color festive outfits. What a colorful view it was! In the living room, the melodious sound of a traditional Dashain dhun (tune) was playing on grandpa's old radio. A big rectangular sukul (traditional hand-woven carpet) was laid on the floor and the younger ones were receiving Tika (a mixture of rice, yoghurt, and holy red powder) on their forehead and Jamara (green plant grown with hybrid seeds of rice, maize, barley, and others) on their head along with the blessings of the elder ones. Sums of money (Dakshina) were also being handed out to the younger as a sign of good luck.

Loud laughter and gossip could be heard from the kitchen. My mom and my aunts were preparing all the ingredients and my grandma was cooking food on a traditional mud stove. The fire on the stove was lit with logs. The potent smell of the smoke from the burning of logs was all over the house but it was the price that everyone was willing to pay. Bhaat, daal, tarkari, achar, poori, furaula, kheer, laddu and rasbari (which is steamed rice, lentil soup, vegetable curry, pickle, deep fried bread made from unleavened whole-wheat flour, crispy black gram fritters, rice pudding, spherical sweet, and milk-based dessert respectively); all the vegetarian food that I love was being prepared on stainless-steel dishes. The smell of pure ghee on the steamed rice and lentils, spicy cucumber and potato pickle, the flavorings of the vegetable curry vibrated into the air, and everybody was drooling over the unique and special smell of my grandma's home cooked Nepali cuisine. But the thing that was more attractive was that the ladies inside the kitchen were tasting the food, so gracefully, and one could know from their faces, that the food was made extremely delicious.

After all the preparations and cooking were done, everybody sat down on each of the round sukul (traditional hand-woven carpet). “It smells so good! I can’t wait to eat the food,” one of my cousins said. “Yeah, me too! I heard that the way to a person’s heart is through their stomach and our grandma knows that way perfectly,” replied the other. I could hear everyone having a fun conversation. “Grandma, we’re super hungry,” the kids were shouting. They were running around and making a mess as their stomachs were growling. My uncle was never fond of vegetarian dishes. “I’m so hungry,” he said, but he did not seem quite happy with the dishes that were made.

Finally, after a long wait, the food was served on a plate for all of us. The plate full of white bhaat, black daal, orangish brown colored chickpea curry, yellow cauliflower curry, green and yellow cucumber and potato pickle, cream-colored poori, and brown furaulas in the middle and as a dessert, white kheer, orange laddus, white rasbari on the sides; the food platter looked full and colorful. The aroma of the food platter made my hunger rise exponentially. Rather than using spoons, using clean hands is the traditional way of eating Nepali cuisine. So, everyone started to eat the food with their clean hands. As soon as I began eating, the taste of all the unique and rainbow flavors hit my taste buds in such a way that it felt so comforting and enjoyable. The desserts made an explosion of sweetness over my tongue. It created an instant increase of dopamine in my brain because of the sugar rush. My whole body felt so energetic after I took a bite and enlightened my whole mood.

The organic home-grown food with my grandma’s unique way of cooking which included her special unique taste made the food more special. She has been cooking food since she was 13 years old, so the food she prepares tastes delicious with the perfect blend of all the spices. Plus, the food being prepared in an open fire mud stove tastes way better than the food

prepared in a modern automatic stove. My uncle, who was not happy with the dishes that were made, was the one who added more food to his plate. Everyone was slurping, mmm-ing, and praising so anyone could tell that everybody had all the food to their heart's content. At the end, kheer, laddus, and rasbari as a dessert were like an icing on the cake.

I have certainly eaten and enjoyed various kinds of food till today and I have had a lot of good and bad moments related to food. However, when I am asked to describe the best food experience that I have had in my life, the first thing that appears in my mind is my grandma's handmade Nepali cuisine. To my way of thinking, food is the best way to introduce culture. Quality food easily touches the five senses of a person. Eating the most delicious food accompanied by your loved ones makes the experience much better, especially when the environment is festive. For me, enjoying my best food experience in my grandparents' house will always be a fun, nostalgic memory. As of now, staying in a different country has made me realize to have more appreciation for Nepali culture and the cuisine. The meals that I have grown up eating will always be near and dear to my heart and will always bring nostalgia to the place where I was born.