reasons behind them. A typical Muslim Bangladeshi meal, for example, writes Osman, "consists of three to five dishes eaten in a certain sequence, depending on the flavour of each. All dishes are placed on a *madur* (mat) or *pati* (mattress), or if guests are attending on a *dastarkhan* (floor spread)." On the other hand a Bengali Hindu meal the author writes "may follow the same sequence (bitter to sweet) but the items are served separately in small *kasha* (bell metal) bowls to each guests." But from the onset, Osman points out that the variety and sophistication of Bangladeshi cuisine is linked to the Bangladeshi culture of *appayan* or hospitality which is a national characteristic and gives ample reason for the preoccupation with cooking.



Chitol Pitha (thick rice bread), Chita Ruti (thin rice bread), Dim Chawra (spicy scrambled eggs) and Khejurer gur (date palm syrup).



Eilish Polao (Hilsa pulao)

For those not so familiar with our culture will find it fascinating the reasons why we use our fingers while eating:"not only is it easier to pick fish bones, but one also gets a feel of food texture, which is almost as important as the distinct quality of each item felt by the tongue."

Like all good cooking, ingredients used in Bangladeshi cuisine have to be fresh. Different type of foods moreover, are meant to be eaten in particular seasons. Eleventh-century *Khonar Bochon* (Khona's aphorisms) for example writes Osman, "recommends eating the herb *nalita* in Vaishakh, *matha* (buttermilk) in Jaishtha, *doi* (yoghurt) in Aashar, *khoi* (popped paddy) in Shravan, *taal* (palm fruit) in Bhadra, *shwasha* (cucumber) in Aashin, *kochu* (yam) in Karthik, *bael* (wood apple) in Agrahayan, *panta bhaat* (sour rice gruel) in Pous, making liberal use of mustard oil in Magh, ginger in Falgun and *korolla* in Chaitro."

The book, published by Bangla Television in association with Mapin Publishing, describes the aromatic spices of Bangladeshi cuisine which as Osman explains has evolved from pre-Vedic times and has added to its repertoire hints of Turkish, Arabian, Persian and Mughal cuisine thus giving us those mouth-watering delicacies like *korma, biryani, porota* and so on.

As for the actual recipes, the names of the items are inspiring enough to make even the non-cook think of taking up the *khunti* and *korai*. *Maan Kochu Malaikari* (taro in coconut milk) *Bilashi Baygoon* (aubergine in yoghurt and poppy seed), *Morich Mangsho* (chilli Chevon) are some of the unusual items. Commonly known dishes such as *Eilish Pulao* (Hilsa pulao) *Shorshe Eilish* (mustard Hilsa) *Labra* (mixed vegetable fry) *Morog Musallam* (Whole Chicken Roast) and of course, good old *Katchi Biryani*.

For those with a sweet tooth and there are many among the Bengali clans, there is a whole collection of salivating recipes of delicate desserts such as *roshogolla, sandesh, pitha khirtosh* (rice cake soaked in thickened milk) and *taaler khir* (palm fruit pudding).

The entire book is divided into delightful sections such as food during rainy days, winter breakfast, special festivals such as Eid, Bijoya and Pahela Baishakh. The writer suggests menus for banquets and weddings and even as traditional Bengali Christmas dinner. An exhaustive glossary only adds to the richness of this very entertaining book.

As the author mentions in his introductory comments, everything you need to entertain the Bangladeshi way is here in this book. One word of advice though, make sure you are not too hungry when you leaf through the book. The descriptions and luscious pictures of mouth-watering Bangladeshi food are sure to make you drool.

Reviewed by **AASHA MEHREEN AMIN**
Photographs: **Rukshara Osman**
This book is available at Words n' Pages in Gulshan 1.