



SPOTLIGHT

# The mechho Bangali in us

I am probably the worst food critic. I don't scrutinise my food. I never intend to guess the names of all the ingredients used in the making. And neither do I visit the kitchen quizzing the cook about her recipes, nor do I take even a short, curious glimpse to see what's being made. For me, what matters is the end product. Prepared. Right there on the dining table. Ready to be savoured. And hence I have so much time to think and ponder when I eat, instead of using it on analysing and studying the food. I let my mind wonder. Like the other afternoon, when I sat to eat 'rui bhaja' -- with rice and a few drops of ghee on it -- I thought about our love for fish. Why do we love fish so much? We are known as 'Mechho Bangali'. There are, in fact, many types of mechho Bangalis. We are all Mechho Bangalis all right, but your reason for being a Mechho Bangali may be entirely different from mine! Which breed of Mechho Bangali are you?



## Mechho Bangali by fate

"I will gladly trade you my fishing net for your city life," Johnny, my cousin who lived in our ancestral home in Khitirpara, Bikrampur used to say. But for me - being an urbanite - the rural landscape has always been inviting. The lush greenery and (more importantly) the dense network of canals and the infinite floodplains seem like a part of heaven.

Back in my childhood, Johnny and I used to go fishing. For me, it was all charming and exciting. For him, it was routine work.

Khitirpara is not far off from the mighty Padma. Moreover, the village boasts numerous ponds. The canal is a main route of commute. In monsoon, one water body merges into another, and people often find it easier to use boats than any other form of transportation.

This village is not an exception. Bangladesh has innumerable water bodies -- large and small, permanent and temporary.

Hence, the bounty of fish is incredible. It is only natural that Bengalis have centred their diet on fish. As the culinary expert Shawkat Osman, in his book, *Recipes from the Rannaghor*, noted, "From the beginning of time to this day, Bangladesh's water bodies have been our magic larder: without plough and pay, there has been -- and there still is -- in the lakes, rivers, beels, ponds and the Bay a ready supply of all sorts of fish for man to catch and woman to cook."

For Johnny, catching and eating fish is second nature.

