

FOODIE ON A *DIE*

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I used to be one of those happy (read: sad) people who consider food as the one and only love of their lives. However, there came a time when I had to sever ties with my not-so-skinny love and go on a brutal diet. My days were really messed up, as you'll see. The struggle was real.



ECHOES BY
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Where would we be without salt? In ancient Rome, we wouldn't earn a *salarium*. Salt derives from the Latin *sal* (and thus salary). The Romans used to pay their soldiers in salt. They put salt in all of their sauces and called it *salsa* (salty). The French got rid of the 'l' and called it sauce. The Spanish kept the 'l' and danced the *salsa*. The Romans called salted meat *salsicuss*. The French called it *saucisse*, from where we get sausage in English, while the Germans decided to call their thinly cut salted pieces of meat *salami*. Our relation with salt is more than just salacious, which also derives from salt.

Today we take salt for granted. We can produce salt in factories anywhere in the world. This wasn't the case in ancient times. There are only two natural sources of salt: sea salt and rock salt from salt mountains. Natural sources of minerals are either limited in supply where found or are not available at all in some places. Before refrigeration, salt was vital for preserving food to be eaten when there was no harvest. The Arabs would use salt to dry meat. People in Bengal would use salt to dry fish. People in Northern China and Mongolia would use salt to dry vegetables. This usefulness of salt in preserving food had two consequences. First, rulers had to make sure they could control the production and sales of salt. Second, rulers had to ensure its supply during wars.

Before World War I, armies had mules,

BREAKFAST

I woke up in the morning expecting some crunchy toast, two eggs-sunny side up, mashed potatoes, some sausages, a glass of homemade orange juice and a cup of coffee on a nice wooden tray on my bed-stand, only to realise I did not have a bed-stand. Walking up to the dining room, I found this scary looking, soggy bowl of sugar-free oats laid out for me and some bland sugar-free tea that tasted nothing like tea but more like a three day old sock that had been chewed on by Mr. Snuffles. It took me one whole hour to stuff that horror down my throat.

LUNCH

The guy at the school canteen cast me weird, heartbroken looks because this was the first time I did not buy something from the canteen. While the *samosa*, *shingara* and oh-so-delicious shawarma teased me, I sat there at one corner of the canteen with a lunch box full of sliced cucumber and another smaller box containing eggs that looked as if they had been run over by a truck. My friends suggested we bunk classes and go to this new dessert place just across the street, as they supposedly had the best mango cheesecake in town but I



refused. I just sat there with the sad cucumber slices and the sad eggs and contemplated life. I figured I could actually find happiness in healthy, fat-free food. But capitalism taught me happiness does not come from free stuff.

EVENING SNACK

I thought of the times when I would go out every evening and have a brownie with a latte or a slice of tiramisu with jasmine tea, and then realise I couldn't breathe because my pants were too tight. However, my mother made me these

almond and oatmeal cookies to go along with my evening tea and they were delicious. I realised this was for my own good, that one day I'd be able to go back to what I was before all these cafes and restaurants mushroomed around town. One day my thighs would be thinner than my crush's entire body and he'd finally see the beautiful face that hid behind a triple patty burger all this time.

DINNER

I had hoped I'd find some warm chicken curry with some rice and my mother's special *daal* with butter for dinner, but in vain.

What I did get for dinner were mashed bitter gourd, sticky rice (not that it was meant to be sticky but it turned out that way), a lentil soup that tasted somewhat like my grandmother's plastic shower cap and two pieces of boiled fish. And when I asked if there was anything for dessert (even a tea-spoon of sugar would do honestly), I was promised an Alpenliebe and I couldn't be happier. However, I passed out before I could get to dessert.

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A Salty History



horses, and elephants. Army generals needed salt to feed the animals and to preserve food for the troops. If one army could deny the opponent salt, their chances of winning would increase. One factor behind why the Northerners won the US Civil War of the 1860s is they could deny the Southerners access to salt. When Napoleon retreated from Russia in 1812, many of his troops and animals

died on their return because the French army ran out of salt.

There was a time not too long ago that salt taxes were a part of life. The Ottomans of today's Turkey realised the strategic importance of salt. Salt producing villages in the empire were exempted from paying cash taxes. Rulers of other empires weren't as wise as the Ottomans. Salt was one of the factors why the British

had to leave their "Jewel in the Crown," India.

Ancient India was no stranger to salt taxes. However, these taxes went beyond the tolerance of the public from the times of the East India Company. The British Salt Act allowed only the British to produce and sell salt. Indians were forced to buy salt from the British with a high tax. The Salt Tax hit the poor the most because salt was a vital ingredient of their diet. On March 12, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi marched peacefully with a handful of followers from his Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad. As they passed from one village to another, more and more people joined. By the time The Mahatma reached the coastal town, Dandi, on the Arabian Sea on April 5, there were tens and thousands of followers peacefully protesting against the unjust Salt Tax. The rest was history.

The people of Persia (Iran) have a custom that crept into our culture. If you accept salt (*namak*) from someone at dinner, even if that person is your enemy, you don't harm the person (*namak haraam*). For dessert, let's finish off with the British. Read this with a 'pinch of salt'. Find out the rest for yourself. Don't completely believe everything you read.

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