



SPECIAL FEATURE

Food philosophies

Of Slow Food and the Mediterranean diet

A weeklong multifaceted food fiesta across the globe has come to an end on 24 November, 2019. This year's 'Week of Italian Cuisine in the World' — which focuses on promoting Italian cuisine — was the first of its kind to be held in Bangladesh, and was run by the Italian Embassy in Dhaka. Just prior to the beginning of the Week, over a small, casual dinner, hosted by the Ambassador at his residence, Star Lifestyle spoke to two Italian promoters of Slow Food. They spoke on the Italian origin of the concept, and also the Mediterranean diet that is prevalent in the country.

If you are a food connoisseur, you surely cherish and celebrate the immense diversity of cuisines around the world. Whether it's Bangladesh or Italy, food is beautifully diverse and unique wherever you go, having been passed down through numerous generations and centuries.

The culinary diversity ought to be protected, which means the preservation, the promotion and the protection of farmers, traditional cooking, et al.

And this is exactly what Slow Food is all about. As a concept, Slow Food was founded in the 1980s, according to its website, 'to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions, counteract the rise of fast life, and combat people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from and how our food choices affect the world around us.'

Since its inception, the Slow Food movement gained popularity among millions of people in over 160 countries.

Chef Eliana Vigneti, who also had a long and reputable career in science and research, said that there are three tenets upon which Slow Food stands: 'good,' 'clean,' and 'fair.'

To elaborate, Slow Food favours fresh and flavoursome seasonal diets which is a part of the local culture; stresses the importance of animal welfare, environment-friendliness, and health in terms of food production



and consumption; and accessible prices for consumers and fair conditions and pay for small-scale farmers.

Eliana, along with her husband, Romeo Catalani, run a restaurant together in Italy. They came to Dhaka to promote authentic Italian cuisine to some chefs here in the city — as part of the 'Week of Italian Cuisine in the World' — sharing with them the authentic ways of preparing Italian delicacies.



"Every culture has something unique to offer. I am here to present what original Italian food is all about," Eliana said.

Her husband added, "Take risotto, for example. This rice dish is unique in its own way. Obviously, any cooked rice is not risotto. There is a particular way of cooking it. And so, in order to get the real taste of this Italian dish, you have to understand



and practice the Italian way of cooking risotto, thus preserving and celebrating the culture of the region, which is what Slow Food philosophy is also about."

Just like in Italy, the concept of Slow Food is also relevant to our country (as it is to any country), given that we have a rich array of local food. So much so, Eliana said that Bangladeshi food had also been featured in a Slow Food event held in Italy.

Just like Slow Food, another notion of

goodness in food is the Mediterranean diet, a model which is globally very much in vogue nowadays.

"The Mediterranean model is a very healthy one, and is prevalent in Italy. Our country scores very high on life expectancy and various health indices," Enrico Nunziata, Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh, said. "And that's why we promote it during the Week of Italian Cuisine in the World."

UNESCO has recognised this diet in its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Eliana explained about the diet, "You have to think of a food pyramid. Around the bottom, you have items such as fruits and vegetables; at the top is meat. Also, eating what's seasonal is essential. Another important aspect of the Mediterranean diet is the use of extra virgin olive oil, which is very healthy."

The culinary culture of the Mediterranean is not just about food items, but of the tradition of eating together as well.

Good food and good company — exactly what makes for great dining.

By M H Haider
Food photos: Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
Other photos: Orchid Chakma