

THE FOOD AND FISH OF BENGAL

by Aanandika Sood

The Bengali calendar, native to the region of Bengal, is still followed in the States of West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. The New Year is called *Poila baishakh* and marks the beginning of festivities and treats.

The Bengali calendar consists of six seasons, each comprising two months. The delightful names of the twelve months of the Bengali calendar are taken from an ancient text called *Surya Siddhanta*.

There is a popular saying in Bengali which goes like this *Baaro maase, tero parbon* which translates into — Thirteen festivals in twelve months. This not only draws attention to the abundance of festivities here in this State, but also to a huge variety of dishes that are cooked for the festivals.

There are so many dishes prepared for each of these festivals that each one deserves attention. But there are a few ingredients which are a must for every occasion. Let us take a look at these today.

1. Potatoes — The Bengali calendar commences in mid-April of the Gregorian year. *Poila baishakh*, as mentioned earlier, marks the beginning of the new year.

The day begins quite early with processions called *Prabhat pheris*. Now who wouldn't be ready for a big meal after that? The spread generally includes *luchi* and *alor torkari*, *radhaballavi* with *cholar daal* or *alor dum* and much more. *Alu* or potatoes are an



Hilsa curry

intrinsic part of a Bengali's diet. Potatoes can be found in almost every Bengali preparation. They are present in the famous biriyani, they are also added to any fish preparation. They make for some great standalone dishes like those mentioned before. The beauty of this vegetable is that these very dishes can further be

manipulated and made with a great number of variations, thanks to the versatile potato.

2. Fish — Every Bengali worth his salt knows his fish. This is the most important source of protein in the Bengali diet. Almost every part of the fish, except for the fins, scales and innards, is con-



Luchi and alor dum

sumed. Unlike in other regions, the head of the fish (rich in phosphorous) is given a great deal of importance and is often fed to children. Almost forty varieties of freshwater fish are consumed. The popular ones are rohu, locally called *rui*, *katla*, *koi*, *tangra* and *shingi*. The saltwater fish *hilsa*, called *ilish* in Bengali, enjoys an iconic status. It is

a delicacy and is available seasonally.

There are innumerable ways of cooking fish — according to its texture, fat content and bones. Fish can be fried, roasted or steamed along with seasonal veggies or all by itself.

For example when cooked in a simple tomato based gravy it is called *maacher jhol* and when cooked in a mustard base with green chillies it is called *shorshe batar jhaal*. It is said that *hilsa* can be cooked in about 108 different ways. Another much loved item is the prawn.

3. Chenna — No Bengali meal is complete without ample sweet quotient. The list of *mishiti* includes the famous *mishitdoi*, *payesh*, *semui*, *sandesh* and *rosogulla*. Chenna, or as it is known in Bengali *channa*, is the main ingredient used for the two most renowned dessert preparations. A crumbly, moist form of cheese, chenna is generally made from the milk of water buffaloes. It is a healthier option for weight watchers who want to avoid fried or sugar-laden sweets like *gulab jamun* and can also be consumed by lactose intolerant people.



Chenna sandesh

The Huntsman and the Magic Spear

by Reeja Radhakrishnan

This is an ancient story that comes from the Aboriginal people of Australia. It is, as they call it, a *Dreamtime tale*, a story from the time before time.

In that time before time, there was a hunter who made himself a spear. Along with the spear he made a *woomera*, which is used to throw the spear. You could use a *woomera* as a weapon, too, or as a shield or a tool to cut up the game you caught.

But this was no ordinary spear. It was very special, made from the magic of the trees. The wood for the spear came from the magic trees and the sap was used to bind the spear to the spearhead. The magic spear had the power of seven such spears. In one throw it could kill seven fish. And when you threw it it was hard to know, from the seven shadows, which one was the real spear. For the hunter it was a prized possession for it was a spear that he guarded his family with and that he used for hunting.

Everyone knew he was the guardian of the sacred spear and respected him for it. The huntsman was brave and responsible too. He would go out to hunt every day, bringing back plenty of fish, kangaroo and emu for all his people to eat. Naturally, the tribe had great respect and regard for him. But among them was a witch doctor who was jealous of our huntsman's popularity. More than anything else, he coveted the magic spear. *I will have that spear for myself, come what may*, he thought to himself and came up with an evil plan.

One morning as usual, the huntsman went out with his magic spear to find some food so that his people could eat. The witch doctor, in the meantime, stole a dilly bag from one of the old women in their village. A dilly bag was a woven bag made from

plant fibres that womenfolk carried with them to collect yam, berries and roots. But this bag, like the magic spear, had powers inside it.

Having seized the dilly bag, the witch doctor put his gnarled hand inside and got for himself that great power that lay within. Now the evil witch doctor had the entire tribe under his control and they were but prisoners to his will. Whatever he demanded, they had no choice but to obey. The witch doctor took over the tribe and appointed himself their leader.

When the huntsman hero returned to his camp after many days passed, he was taken back at the new situation. The witch doctor, confident that the powers he had acquired from the dilly bag would make him invincible, launched his attack on the hunter. He could control the elements now. Magically he created lightning thunder bolts that he sent hurtling towards the huntsman. But all the thunderbolts got deflected, by the huntsman's *woomera*, which protected him. The huntsman seized one of the thunderbolts with his bare hands and

kept walking towards the witch doctor. Now the witch doctor was not expecting that. Really, did this young huntsman who could create such a magical spear, have the blessings of the Great Spirit himself? "You think you can kill me so easily?" asked the huntsman, raising his magic spear that cast its seven shadows. The witch doctor, like all bullies was a coward and knew he could not win this battle. So he went down on his knees and begged for mercy. "Sorry, sorry, sorry! I really shouldn't have..."

The huntsman was not a cruel man and had it in him to forgive this evil man. But he could not go unpunished for his misdeeds. The whole camp was watching now, relieved and happy that their ordeal was over at last. "You have to pay for this," said the huntsman towering above the witch doctor who was now crouching pathetically, quivering with fear.

"Punish me, any which way you deem it fit, but please don't kill me," begged the witch doctor.

The huntsman struck the witch doctor's legs with his spear, and there were seven wounds that bled. With those wounds the powers that the witch doctor had acquired from the old woman's dilly bag disappeared too. A great light went out of him and went back into the dilly bag where it had come from. The witch doctor was redeemed by the law of the tribe for he had taken the punishment for his crime.

Order was restored in the camp and peace reigned once again, thanks to the huntsman and his sacred spear. And he had brought home a real feast for them that evening — a kangaroo, a wallaby and an emu. That night they celebrated with a *corroboree*, a song and dance ritual where everybody danced with painted faces, adorned with colourful feathers and twigs. They knew that with the huntsman and his magic spear, they would always be safe and happy.



ILLUSTRATION: TAPAS RANJAN

Avoid Redundant Use of Prepositions

One aspect of the English language that is hard for non-native speakers of English to master is prepositions. They tend to use prepositions either incorrectly or redundantly. Recently, a friend requested me to edit a report in which I came across the following sentences:

■ The participants were **awarded with** cash prizes and certificates.

■ They were able to **cope up** with pressure.

■ The group was **divided up** into many sub-groups.

In each of these sentences, there is an unnecessary preposition. Though it is not incorrect to say 'awarded with', the preposition 'with' in the first sentence makes it wordy and is therefore unnecessary. Though many expressions with additional prepositions are grammatically correct and acceptable, it is wise not to use them in academic writing. In modern English unnecessary prepositions are avoided as wordiness is considered poor quality. The British National Corpus (BNC) has 2,484 results for the search 'awarded' whereas there are only four results for the search 'awarded with' (as on September 3, 2014). Here are some authentic examples from BNC.

■ Prizes will be awarded to the top three entrants in each region.

■ In the event of a tie, the prize will be awarded to the entrant who answers the tie break in the most apt and amusing way.

'To cope up with' is incorrect as 'up' is unnecessary. It is a very common error in India. We can find numerous examples of the incorrect phrase 'cope up with' in official documents and even in news reports. Here are examples of the correct use of 'cope':

■ My secretary could not cope with the work pressure.

■ He has learnt how to cope with migraine.

■ She finds it hard to cope with her demanding husband.

'Up' in the phrase 'divided up into' is unnecessary and the inclu-

sion of it makes the phrase incorrect.

■ The article is divided into three parts.

■ The Communication Skills Lab course is divided into two components: Career Lab and English Language Lab.

Some more examples of sentences with unnecessary prepositions:

■ I will discuss **about** the problem in the next meeting.

■ Where did you send the scan report **to**?

■ He has gone **to** upstairs.

■ I don't have enough money to meet **with** expenses.

■ The Director's office is **in**

English BLUES

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downstairs.

■ The Vice-President travels **to** abroad once in two months.

■ Please meet **up with** the principal at 10 o'clock.

■ I returned **back** to Chennai only this morning.

In each sentence, the preposition in **bold** is redundant and should be removed to make the sentences grammatically correct.

Readers interested in understanding the use of prepositions in a wide variety of sentences can download the file 'Mastering Preposition Combinations' from the site: <http://learnwithlloyd.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/prepositioncombinations.pdf>

ENGLISH BLUES

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VEDIC MATH

The Special Number 9 Again

We saw last week that 9 is a special number and calculations with 9 are always easy. We learned that the sum of the digits of multiples of 9 is always 9, using which we multiplied numbers between 11 and 19 by 9. Now using the same concept let us see how to multiply any two-digit number by 9. When we take two-digit numbers the product will be a three-digit number.



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Let us see the steps involved:

◆ Look at the tens digit of the number. Subtract the next consecutive number of this from the number. This will give you the first two digits of the answer.

◆ The remaining digit can be obtained by completing the total of 9 in the sum of the 3 digits.

Example: 26 x 9

◆ The tens digit is 2. So we subtract 3 (the next number in sequence after 2) from 26. $26 - 3 = 23$. These are the first two digits of the answer.

◆ The total of the three digits should be 9, which means $2 + 3 +$ the last digit = 9.

◆ So 4 is the last digit.

Answer: 234

When multiplying by 9 we always rely on the rule that the sum of the digits in any multiple of 9 is always 9.

Example: 54 x 9

◆ The tens digit of 54 is 5. So we

subtract 6 (the next number in sequence after 5) from 54. $54 - 6 = 48$. These are the first two digits of the answer.

◆ The sum of the three digits must be 9. $4 + 8 = 12$ and $1 + 2 = 3$.

◆ So 6 is the last part of the answer. Answer: 486

Example: 87 x 9

◆ The tens digit is 8. Subtract 9 from 87. $87 - 9 = 78$.

◆ Now $7 + 8 = 15$, and $1 + 5 = 6$.

◆ To complete the total of 9 we need a 3.

◆ 3 is the last part of the answer. Answer: 783

Example: 95 x 9

◆ Subtract 10 from 95. $95 - 10 = 85$.

◆ $8 + 5 = 13 = 4$

◆ $4 + 5$ gives a total of 9.

Answer: 855

Always keep in the mind that the sum of the digits in any multiple of 9 is always 9.