

'Writers are always hungry'

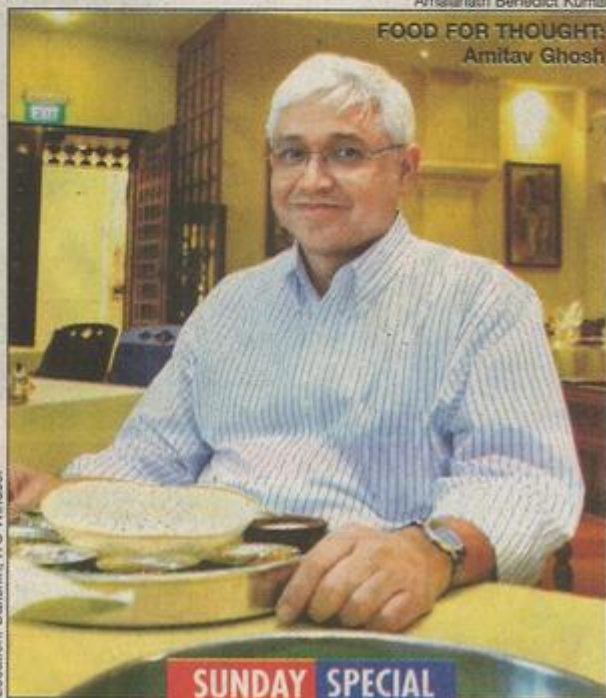
Amalanath Benedict Kurma

If you want to get Amitav Ghosh talking, catch him over a meal. A man of few words — his answers at other times are deliberate and to the point — he is completely at ease over a meal. In this case, lunch. His love for food is evident in the many mentions of numerous cuisines in his books. "*Sea of Poppies* has many long meals too," he says, paying close attention to every chutney and pickle that's served.

He inquires about them, tastes and savours each. "I want to try some local pickles. The best I've ever had are in Goa," he says. So, is that his favourite home? "The thing about all my homes, be it Kolkata, Goa or the US, is that each place is different. I love the urban Kolkata life as much as I love the rural Goan life, amidst my woodpeckers. The tamarind tree in my compound has the best flavour," Ghosh says.

As the chef approaches, all other talk ceases. "I'll have a jeera drink," he tells the man who will now serve an author, who's travelled the world, eaten the best of cuisines and knows how to cook. Hot rasam is suggested. It's prawns for starters and appams and stew for the main course. "I've visited Bangalore many times," Ghosh continues. "The streets are more crowded now. Bangaloreans are very humble. At one of my book readings, a man standing at the back row came up to me and introduced himself as Nandan Nilekani," he recalls, as the prawns with curry leaves is served.

A "hmmm..." and a nod assure the stewards that their guest likes the food. And when they're out of earshot, "My version of this dish will be a strong competitor. It's not what you add to the food, it's what you take away from it," says Ghosh, who's now talking non-stop. "I enjoy cooking. My writer



Location: Dakshin, ITC Windsor

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:
Amitav Ghosh

SUNDAY SPECIAL

Amitav Ghosh loves to eat, cook, travel, watch movies and listen to music. All that amidst writing his best-sellers

friends come home often and writers are always hungry," he laughs. And he cooked while he was working on a book, when his wife was away. "I enjoyed spending time with the kids. They knew that when Baba's in his study, he's not to be disturbed," he says.

His school and college years were rewarding as well, Ghosh says. "The teaching wasn't outstanding, it was what you learnt from your peers. And that's what's exciting about Indian education. You learn more from your peers than the syllabi," he points out.

The appams are served as the topic shifts to movies and music. "Hindustani classical is my fave. I love Western classical too," he says. As for movies, Ghosh says, "I like thrillers and science fiction.

I liked Santhosh Sivan's *Before the Rains and Jab We Met*." He has got many offers to make his books into movies, but nothing main stream. "There are many strands and cross-cutting elements

in my stories. I enjoy the research and rarely write about a place I haven't been to," he says.

Lunch is over. "It was a fantastic meal," he says, much to the delight of the chef and stewards. And yes, he will be back again the next day. One final question... When did he decide that *Sea of Poppies* would be the first of a trilogy? "While I was finishing the book I realised that I'd more to say." Told you Amitav Ghosh speaks the most when he's eating.

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