



## THE BENGALI FIVE SPICE CHRONICLES

Exploring the Cuisine of Eastern India

By Rinku Bhattacharya

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## New Cookbook takes Home Cooks on a Culinary Journey of the Bengali Region of Eastern India

*The Bengali Five Spice Chronicles* offers a panoramic view of one of India's most delicious, and least-known, regional cuisines.

Bengalis are one of the most food and culture obsessed people in India. They are commonly compared to the French in that regard, as dining and entertaining are such an integral part of their culture. What makes Bengali cuisine so unique are the variations and complexities that are a result of practice and delicate subtlety. This fall, a new cookbook brings this distinctive culinary experience to home kitchens in the U.S. In **The Bengali Five Spice Chronicles**, author Rinku Bhattacharya explains the food and culture of her native homeland in Eastern India and showcases the recipes that are at the heart of Bengali life.

The book gets its title from the five-spice blend Bengalis call panch phoron. This spice blend consists of five whole spices in equal proportions: cumin seeds, mustard seeds, nigella seeds, fenugreek seeds, and fennel seeds and is at the heart of Bengali flavors and the individual spices form the basis of the Bengali pantry.

“The Bengali diet leans heavily on vegetables, rice and fish. Bengali cooks prepare a variety of imaginative dishes using the many types of vegetables that grow in the region year round,” Rinku explains. “A traditional Bengali meal sequence involves eating through a rainbow assortment of vegetables, and then finishing off usually with a fish dish, but sometimes mutton or goat. Since Bengalis rely on seasonal foods and usually eat what is available, meals are prepared in small quantities so cooking is a daily ritual.”



With over 180 easy-to-follow recipes incorporating a balance of traditional and contemporary recipes, **The Bengali Five Spice Chronicles** showcases the best of the Bengali table. The book begins with a thorough introduction to Bengali culture and cooking, including sections on spices, ingredients, and equipment. Recipe chapters cover Rice & Breads, Lentils, Fried Vegetables and Fritters, Vegetarian First Courses, Vegetarian Entrees, Eggs, Fish, Chicken & Poultry, Meat Dishes, Chutneys & Relishes, Drinks & Snacks, and Desserts.

Rinku has adapted the cuisine for the American kitchen and markets making it easy and accessible to find ingredients. Some of the recipes in the book include tempting dishes like; **Eggs Cooked in Caramelized Onion Sauce; Crisp Lentil Cakes in Curried Gravy; Lentil-Stuffed Puffy Breads; Tart Pigeon Peas and Green Mangoes; Lightly Spiced Pan-Sautéed Okra; Green Plantain and Taro Cakes; Golden Cauliflower in Orange Mustard Sauce;**

**Slow-Cooked Rice with Saffron, Shrimp and Rosewater; Steamed Mustard Fish Wrapped in Banana Leaves; Red Snapper in a Coconut Tamarind Sauce; Pickle-Spiced Lamb Curry; Coconut and Cardamom Fudge, and Milk Cake.**

The Bengal region is made up of the Indian state of West Bengal and the country of Bangladesh (formerly East Bengal). The food of this area comes from a long history of influences, both foreign and South Asian and stems from the historical invasions and trade links it had with many parts of the world.

For anyone who loves to cook and experience food of different cultures, **The Bengali Five Spice Chronicles** is a fascinating culinary journey without ever having to leave the kitchen.

#### **About the Author**



Rinku Bhattacharya was born in Kolkata, India and moved to the U.S. about 25 years ago. She has been teaching cooking classes for the last seven years at her home, community college, and Whole Foods Market in Westchester, New York. Rinku has a natural passion and love for regional Indian cuisine and uses it to share and connect with her cultural heritage. She has travelled extensively and specializes in adapting Indian cuisine in global environments and kitchens. Her deep commitment to using seasonal ingredients for Indian cooking is reflected in her recipes. Rinku writes a popular blog, [Cooking in Westchester](#), and a weekly column “Spices and Seasons” for the *Journal News* online, Small Bites. She also writes for several online magazines such as Honest Cooking and Masala Mommas. She has been featured in *The Journal News*, *Westchester Enquirer*, *Hudson Valley* magazine and on the Leonard Lopate show on NPR. Rinku holds a master’s degree in finance and non-profit management and lives in Westchester County, New York with her husband, Anshul, daughter, Deepta, son Aadi and cat, Benji.

To learn more about Rinku and Bengali cooking visit her website, [www.CookinginWestchester.com](http://www.CookinginWestchester.com).

#### **SAMPLE RECIPES**

##### **BENGALI FIVE SPICE BLEND (Panch Phoron)**

*The Bengali Five Spice Blend is a blend of five whole spices in equal proportions: cumin seeds, mustard seeds, nigella seeds, fenugreek seeds, and fennel seeds. The fenugreek is a substitution for the spice called radhuni (a form of celery seed relatively uncommon outside of India). The actual panch phoron, however, is available in most Indian stores, often transliterated as panch puran.*

- 1 teaspoon fennel seeds
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon nigella seeds
- 1 teaspoon black mustard seeds
- 1 teaspoon fenugreek seeds

Mix the seeds together evenly. Store in an airtight container and use as needed.

##### **ORANGE SPLIT LENTILS WITH TOMATOES AND CILANTRO (Tomato Dhoney Pata Diye Masoor Dal)**

Makes: 6 servings

*This is a weeknight variation of orange split lentils which are extremely versatile because of their quick cooking time and naturally mild and adaptive taste. They are comforting, simple, and as basic as it gets. Everyone in my family, including*

*my children, loves this lentil. This light variation is a summertime favorite but can be enjoyed as a soup in winter, if desired, with some hot buttered whole wheat toast.*



Prep Time: 5 minutes | Cook Time: 25 minutes

½ cup dried orange/red split lentils (masoor dal)  
½ teaspoon turmeric  
1 teaspoon salt  
4 green chilies, slit lengthwise  
2 ripe tomatoes, chopped  
2 teaspoons ghee (clarified butter)  
1 teaspoon cumin seeds  
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

Put the lentils and 3 cups of water in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Add the turmeric, salt, and green chilies and cook for about 15 minutes. While the lentils are boiling a scum may form on the surface,

gently remove this while the lentils are cooking.

Add the tomatoes and cook for another 5 minutes. Mix the mixture well—it should have a nice soupy consistency that is not too thin or too thick.

Heat the ghee in a small skillet on medium heat for about 1 minute and add the cumin seeds and wait till the seeds begin to sizzle. Pour this seasoned ghee over the lentils and stir in the cilantro.

### **ROAST CHICKEN MARINATED WITH LEMON, CHILIES, AND MOLASSES (Moorgir Roast)**

Makes: 6 servings

*There are many variations of roast chicken seasoned with Indian spices. Some of these hail back to early British times, with names such as Gypsy Chicken. This is my variation. This recipe employs a very simple spice marinade and is basted with a combination of clarified butter and mustard oil. The marinade can also be used on chicken drumsticks with good results.*

Prep Time: 6½ hours (including 6 hours to marinate chicken)

Cook Time: 2 hours (mostly unattended)

4 cloves garlic  
2-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled  
6 green chilies  
2 dried red chilies  
1 teaspoon turmeric  
1½ tablespoons fennel seeds  
2 tablespoons salt  
1 tablespoon molasses  
2 lemons, halved and seeded  
2 small organic free-range chickens (usually about 2 pounds each at farmer's markets)  
1 tablespoon ghee (clarified butter)  
2 tablespoons mustard oil  
2 small red onions, sliced

Place the garlic, ginger, green chilies, dried red chilies, turmeric, fennel seeds, salt, and molasses in a blender. Squeeze in the lemon juice and blend to a paste. Rub this marinade all over the chickens and under the skin. Take care to reach the crevices. Cover the chickens and place in the refrigerator to marinate for about 6 hours.

Pre-heat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease a baking dish large enough to hold the chickens. Place the chickens in the dish. Mix the ghee and mustard oil. Brush the chickens liberally with this mixture. Place in the oven and bake for about 1 hour, removing once to brush with the oil mixture.

Turn the chickens, brush with oil mixture again and bake for about 45 to 60 more minutes. The chicken should be well browned and tender. Turn off the oven and let the chicken rest for about 20 minutes. Cut the chickens into serving-size pieces, garnish with the onion slices before serving.

Recipes may be reprinted with the following credit:

**Recipes from THE BENGALI FIVE SPICE CHRONICLES: Exploring the Cuisine of Eastern India**

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