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It's not about the food – HUSH Supper Club

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Geeta is like her cilantro, mint chutney. Vibrant with a smile equal in genuine shine to the distinctively bright, yet organic green that inspires and enlivens upon first impression, the woman behind [HUSH Supper Club](#) radiates a mysterious depth and intelligence that both surprises the unsuspecting patron and leaves him begging for an encore.

On select weekend nights, the Chicago-born [Indian](#) cook calling herself Geeta, invites a dozen strangers into her eclectically decorated U St home, and transports them not only to another culture, another time, and another place, but also guides and challenges them to examine themselves, to question others, and to beg answers of the larger world.

"What I'm doing in my talk is running a [seminar](#)," explained Geeta who during her dinners discusses Gujarati Jain culture, "I'm asking questions and questioning assumptions and then putting that all together in a salon style."

While reading Plato's "The Symposium" at St. Johns College more than a decade ago, Geeta had fantasies of throwing dinner parties conducive of philosophical banter, but having grown up in a traditional Indian household where education was viewed as not only an opportunity, but also for a woman, a privileged way out of the kitchen, Geeta put her dreams on hold in favor of a career at the World Bank.

"We put \$100,000 in your brain for you to cook?" Geeta remembered her mother saying, "You were too smart to cook. You had a choice to get out of the kitchen."

Though HUSH was a project initially kept secret from her mother, who has since come to understand and appreciate HUSH, Geeta's childhood, which she described as "strangely purebred," had undeniable influence on today's dinner parties.

Geeta recalled between uncontrollable spurts of laughter, chaotic scenes of being in her mother's kitchen among a dozen women screaming at one another about recipes, all of which have been passed down for generations, never recorded by hand.

"Recipes are for strangers. This whole methodology of 'oh how you learn from your mother' like it's so exotic," Geeta said raising her voice with evident passion, "Learning recipes from my mother in a traditional way with tears and screaming and lots of good cooking and ladies arguing about it, that's the human experience. Ain't nothing trendy about it."

Despite being dubbed "trendy" and attracting such prominent members of the D.C. [food](#) scene as Rob Wilder of Jose Andre's ThinkFoodGroup and Amanda McClements of leading online food resource [Metrocurean](#), it is her everyday guests, who like Geeta, are curious, educated, food loving Washingtonians, that create, shape, and mold the HUSH experience.

"I eat out all the time but am particularly of late attracted to dinners or food events that have an educational component," said two-time HUSH guest and FRESHFARM Markets Chef at Market Coordinator Maddy Beckwith.

In between courses, Geeta gives a lecture on religion and its connection to food. She takes the guest-turned-student on an expansive journey through time, detailing the Jain practice of "ahimsa," of no violence, which for 6,000 years has instructed its followers not only to not eat meat, but also to forgo root vegetables like potatoes, garlic, and onions—ingredients fundamental and familiar to cooking in most regions and cultures of the world.

The lecture mentions all Abrahamic religions and resonates at different moments with different guests. Some are physically uncomfortable at the breakdown of their personal religion as being described as a belief in "a guy in the sky," while others close their eyes, break a smile, and sink deep into their seats, overcome with sensual elevation when given the opportunity to smell, taste, and then guess the secret spice native to the Gujarati region that replaces garlic and onions in Jain cooking.

Geeta cites her numerous travels to, and consequent love for, Italy as her greatest dining influence. Traveling to Europe by herself after college, Geeta befriended Venetian twins who invited her to their dinner table and for the first time, opened her eyes to a new culture, one much more similar to her own than she had ever imagined one could be. □

"I learned Italian because I wanted to sit at the supper table with Italians because it's primarily important to them," explained Geeta, "Italians and

Indians are similar on deep levels. Italians talk about food the way I see Indians talk about food, going on about a sauce the way Indians go on for example about jaggery, sugar cane juice. It's squeeze pulp and yet they go on about it so lovingly."

Geeta's guests may not all be Italian or Indian, nor are they all of one ethnicity, race, or age group. What they do have in common is an incessant love for food, for history, for spices, for sensations and experiences elicited by smells, tastes, and textures.

All are affected by food, have been raised with certain rituals around food, have stories involving memorable meals, familial recipes, kitchen disasters, and ingredient mysteries. And as a salon, HUSH is the idiosyncratic venue that encourages these talks and tales.

At the most recent HUSH supper club in June, a guest who as a nurse has dedicated her life to healthy cooking and colorful eating, worked Geeta's knowledge of exotic spices in an attempt to discover the missing ingredient in a cumin bread her late mother made during the guest's childhood.

Though conversation at the HUSH dinner table is guaranteed to be interesting and can range from health care to reality TV, it is this sharing of personal stories and discovery among strangers held together by a common thread of sustenance that makes the experience so entrancingly remarkable and intoxicating.

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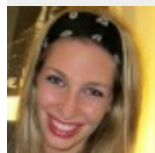
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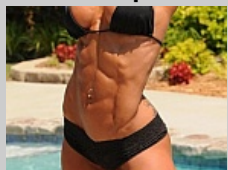
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