

# Eswar Krishnasamy



I come from the tradition of spice traders and travellers. Cooking is the soul of my culture. I'm a 5th generation Malaysian Indian and my ancestors were spice traders who left India in the late 1800s. Spices are versatile and multi-faceted, just like the Indian culture and diaspora. The Rigveda and the Yajurveda Hindu scriptures from around 1000 BC mentions the use and importance of different types of spices. Spices are used in food and in Ayurvedic medicinal

practices. Spices are also present in sacred rituals - from birth to our final death rites. They hold stories of travel, voyages, wars, conquests, migration, displacement, resilience and survival. Spices were once as valuable as gold and the quest to control the spice trade was unfortunately the cause of my ancestors' displacement from their lands.



This dish is called Dhall Tarka, and it varies regionally throughout South Asia.

The reason I chose this dish is because it is often overshadowed by other South Asian dishes, despite it being the one dish that binds us - whether if one is from north, south, east or west India. It also varies throughout its' cultural diaspora. It has been adopted

into food cultures wherever it went and has been loved ever since.

It remains true to its' spirit, while adapting and assimilating, without dominating. It's an everyday staple, and a must-have during festivals. It is usually served with Basmati rice, poori, chappati, naan or roti. It is the one dish that connects me to my family and ancestry, with fondness.



# DHALL TARKA *with Eswar* Chickpea Curry

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Preparation Time: 20 mins

Cooking Time: 45 mins

Vegetarian

## METHOD

Powdered spices:

1 tablespoon cumin powder

1 tablespoon turmeric powder

1 tablespoon Mirch (Chilli powder)

1 tablespoon coriander seed powder

½ teaspoon black pepper powder

½ teaspoon fennel seed powder

½ teaspoon cardamom powder

½ teaspoon aniseed powder

½ teaspoon nutmeg powder

2-3 large chopped tomatoes

1 tablespoon grated ginger

Shredded fresh coriander

Ghee or clarified butter

A stalk of curry leaves

A few bay leaves

Mint leaves

Salt to taste



## INGREDIENTS

500g Chana Dhall

(split yellow gram/split desi chickpeas) – soaked overnight

1 teaspoon turmeric powder

1 teaspoon salt

Tempering Spices:

½ teaspoon Cumin Seeds

8 whole Clove buds

2 sticks Cinnamon

2 whole Star Anise





## METHOD

- 1) Boil the chana dhal that has been soaked overnight with about 3 cups of water, a teaspoon of turmeric powder, grated ginger and salt. Allow it to simmer on medium heat for about 25 minutes, until it is just cooked.

The dhal should not be mushy or watery at this point. The whole grains should be visible, but breaks when pressed with your fingers.

Set aside.

- 2) Heat 3 tablespoons of ghee, on low / medium heat in a large saucepan. If it starts to smoke, the heat is too high.
- 3) Add the spices that have been set aside for tempering:  
Starting with cinnamon, cloves, star anise and then cumin seeds. Some spices burn quickly, hence the 'layered' order.  
When these spices start to crackle, it is said that the life-force from within the spices are being released and activated.
- 4) As soon as spices crackle, quickly add the grated ginger, curry leaves and bay leaves. Keep an eye on the heat as the spices rise.
- 5) As soon as the mixture turns a light golden brown, add the powdered spice mix to the pan.

- 6) Then add the chopped tomatoes - this should stop the spices from burning. Stir and mix these well, until the water from the tomatoes evaporates. It will start to splutter and the oil should "break" at this point.
- 7) Bring back up to medium heat and add the boiled dhal that you have set aside earlier - keep stirring so as not to burn the bottom.
- 8) Cook for about 5 - 10 minutes, until it starts to boil and the dhal starts to break.
- 9) If it has thickened, add some water - the consistency should be more like Bolognese sauce, not Minestrone.
- 10) Add salt to taste.
- 11) Turn off the heat.
- 12) Add the chopped coriander and mint leaves.
- 13) Drop a tablespoon of ghee on the top and let it melt.

This recipe serves 4-6 people.

It is complimented well with yogurt, raita, papadams and/or pickles.

