



Reserved for Royalty

JUST FOR LAUGHS

A Monarchy Based On Mithai And Manners

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Yearning, I was, for that one chocolate from the golden box of delectable delights treasured like some celestial jewel only to be admired from far off. Unable to resist the sugar rush, I slyly picked and unwrapped the chocolate. Just as I was about to engulf it, a sharp voice from behind cut through like a knife. "That's for the guests!" My hand stopped mid-air. That's when the thought of monarchy dawned, where we are mere commoners, and the guests - royalty.

The confidential cabinet

As an Indian, you might have a gist of this rule: 'No mortal hand is allowed to crawl inside the cabinet where the guest's food items hibernate (literally until expiry)'. Go against this, and you have committed treason. A saccharine heaven, this cabinet has all sorts of fancy eatables - dry fruits, sugar coated walnuts, roasted cashews, imported chocolates, and biscuits that scream luxury. Alas, all devoured only from outside the cabinet because they are reserved for those non-existent guests, who don't

plan to visit probably in the next five years. Even the charm that hangs on the key is of the jingling kind, the typical one that makes a lot of sound, a *desi* alternative to a security alarm, as if hiding some sort of national treasure, not *laddoos*, nuts, or chocolates that are about to expire in the next two days!

The royal exchequer

As the doorbell rings announcing the guests, the royal treasury makes its guest appearance. Hand-painted ceramic bowls with golden rims and rich patterns surface from somewhere alongside exquisite tissue paper with a floral print, the kind we would expect Minnie Mouse to use to wipe her tears. Bone china that was once pristine white now shows subtle signs of aging, with the yellowing rims. "*Vintage pieces aise hi dikhte hai*," comes mother's icy sharp retort in case you dare to point that out. And you better watch what you are serving in those vintage pieces, because you, my friend, and not Manju *didi* will be cleaning them later on, because *itni mehengi crockery kahin toot gayi toh?*

The post-guests episode

When the guests leave, the remnants of artefacts go back to the museum (yes, you guessed it right - the cabinet) and enjoy their long vacation. But frequently, theft and robberies from the cabinet are reported. There are times when the father is guarding the cupboard like a true soldier, but he loses character and eventually has some of the Royal Raspberry Kahwa. While our glistening eyes look at the locked cabinet with gluttony, our mothers may or may not slide in a piece of reserved luxury chocolate for us to devour. We Indians live by the ethos of *Atithi Devo Bhavah* - where we treat our guests with hospitality even if it means minor (read: major) domestic deprivation for the hosts.

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