



Model-turned-photographer Prasanna Pandarinathan has curated her family's favourite recipes, offering a glimpse into a traditional repertoire shaped by Malay Chinese nannies, London's Cordon Bleu and Rameswaram's seafood

A Singapore chilli crab in Chennai

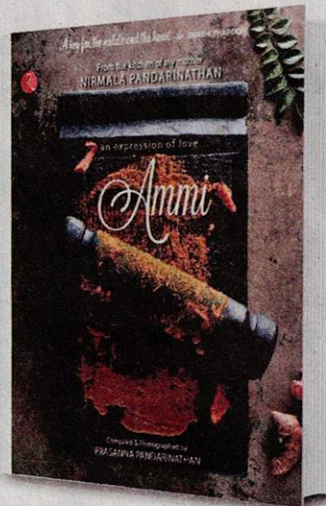
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Can home taste like Pamban fish curry as well as soba noodles? For model-turned-photographer, and now cookbook author, Prasanna Pandarinathan, the flavours of home include both, along with English casseroles, dried fish *poriyal* and Singapore chilli crab. Which is why her recently released book, *Ammi: An expression of love* (Rupa Publications India), written as a tribute to her mother Nirmala Pandarinathan, serves not just as a personal culinary memoir, but also an intriguing example of how much there is to learn from heirloom recipes.

"This is basically my mom's



Tastes like memories (Clockwise from above) Prasanna and her mother; lentil dumplings in coconut gravy; the book ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



journey: the countries she has lived in, her life's journey through food," says Prasanna, explaining how, though her grandparents were from Rameswaram, they lived in Colonial Singapore where her mother was born. "The early part of her life was spent in Singapore and Malaysia, so my mom and her siblings had Malay Chinese nannies. Even now, when my aunts get together, they speak to each other in Malay and Singaporean Mandarin."

Nirmala went to boarding school – Bishop Cotton – in Bengaluru, then was introduced to her husband in Chennai, after which they moved to London. Alone in a new country, with time on her hands, she decided to improve her culinary skills and enrolled at Cordon Bleu.

"She had this blue book from

there, and would consult it all the time for her baking," says Prasanna, adding that the couple then moved to Singapore, and then returned to India, where they lived in Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Bengaluru.

"I was born in Chennai, and a large part of my life was in Bengaluru," she says, adding with a laugh that now she is "a little nomadic – based out of Mumbai, Bengaluru and New York."

When Prasanna's mother passed away in 2010, she was reminded of a promise she had made. "I lost my brother in 2006, and my mother was completely shattered," says Prasanna adding that in an attempt to keep her mother busy she suggested documenting all her recipes. "When I started going through her notebooks, filled with recipes, with my sisters, there were so many that we did not know where to begin."

Admitting that she rarely cooked before this, Prasanna says the book took her back to the kitchen. "I was living in New York then, and modelling. I would make trips to Bengaluru, get up at 6am and visit Russel Market for ingredients, just like she did. That is when I realised the amount of hard work that goes into feeding people: the energy, dedication, passion and generosity..."

Most of the recipes in this collection, such as the Sofiyani chicken biryani, baked crabs and black rice pudding, are surprisingly simple to make, despite how luxurious they look when plated. "We chose 108 of my families' favourite recipes: many are dishes my mother cooked often."

In the process, Prasanna, a fashion photographer, says she studied food photography for this book. "I wanted my images in the book to tell a compelling story, so I brought in things that she loves – jasmine, tuberose, jewellery and saris.. everything that could visually connect the recipes to her."

However, the most powerful connection she feels is when she is at the stove. "It's really strange. Even if I was cooking these recipes for the first time, it was so largely instinctive. I knew what to put in, without even thinking about it... I suppose it is because I grew up watching my mother in the kitchen." The greatest reward for Prasanna is tasting these dishes again. "This is how I can connect with my mother now. It is the closest I can get, and that comforts me."