

THE ASIAN AGE

LABOUR OF LOVE

Ammi, a cookbook memoir by debutant author, Prasanna Pandarinathan, draws in the fragrance of childhood experiences created lovingly by her mother



JACKFRUIT PAYASAM

Jackfruit payasam takes us back to the two jackfruit trees planted by mom in our Bangalore home. The large tropical tree with a strong distinct smell can be appreciated from quite a distance. Rich in energy, dietary fiber, minerals and vitamins and free from saturated fats or cholesterol, it makes a healthy summer treat. As jackfruit tree owners we can tell you this fruit requires skill to cut and palate to appreciate. Soft and sweet jackfruit pieces in milk, garnished with a sprinkling of almonds, melon seeds and a light drizzle of rose water constitutes the jackfruit payasam.

INGREDIENTS

- 1½ kg jackfruit
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup almonds
- 1 cup melon seeds
- 1½ tsp rose water
- ½ tsp cardamom powder
- 8 cups milk
- a pinch of salt

METHOD

Clean and cut the jackfruit into small pieces. Chop the almonds finely or into strips. Boil the milk on low heat till it becomes thicker. Then add sugar and stir for about 15 minutes. Add the jackfruit pieces into the milk and cook on low flame for 30 minutes. When the jackfruit becomes soft, remove it from the stove. Garnish it with chopped almonds, melon seeds, cardamom powder and rose water.

PAMBAN FISH CURRY

The Pamban fish market, in Ramswaram, Mother's ancestral home, was her first stop when she arrived there. This home coastal market with freshest catches is a sight to behold and a smell to get used to. Although I would hold my nose as I watched her bargain for the best price of fish, the anticipation of her spoiling Pamban fish curry would keep me going.

Prep time 20 min, cooking time 20 min, serves 6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg seer fish (or Indian butter fish or mackerel)
- 500 gm sambar (small) onions
- 2 tsp red chili powder
- 3 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- 3 tsp poppy seeds

METHOD

Wash and rub the salt, turmeric and lime juice on the whole fish, cut into medium-sized pieces and keep aside.



SHILPI MADAN

The fragrance of fresh spices being ground in our kitchen each morning served as our alarm clock. I surfaced each morning to the slow, rhythmic sound of the grinding stone or ammi as it is called in Tamil, that the ammi as opposed to the minor since the slow grinding of chutneys and the masalas on the stone brought out the flavours, oils and spice, combining them and giving them a beautiful soft texture simply not attainable by a machine. Nowadays, when I wake up I sometimes lie in bed listening to the silence – a void that was left by her passing away. The ammi misses her too...

I t is a 300-page book, a food atlas, Ammi an expression of love – from the kitchen of her mother, Nirruala Pandarinathan, that Bengaluru-based photographer and former model Prasanna Pandarinathan has put together lovingly chronicling the warm growth of her mother's culinary skills over the years.

"This is my mother's story. Food holds a history for everyone, for my mom it began in the melting pot of culture and cuisines – Colonial Singapore," says Prasanna. "She was raised here in a mix of Indian, Malaysian, Chinese, Indonesian and European cultures. Married, she found herself in London," she shares, reminiscing about the eras they dived with as kids on the shores of Ramswaram when they visited India. The priceless recipe grew a labour of

love,

with Prasanna having collated the treasure trove of lip-smacking areas ranging from fish curry, prawn masala, shrimp pickle, curry leaf chutney and Chettinad curries to egg sambal, mutton dacha and banana blossom vada, and even a tasty rendition of the sundal she used to have at Marina Beach during her early years. It is a rich profusion of ingredients, local, fresh and seasonal – bringing out mouth-watering specials in baked curries and biryani – celebrating the mouthful of pleasure with darling ingredients in mutton, banana blossoms and muskmelon inclusions. The flavours leap out of the pages, teasing your nostrils and palate with flirtation and flounce. "I grew up watching her cook and being so passionate, with making food delicious. She enjoyed having people over, cooking for them... our home was always an open house. I learned a lot once she passed away. I too went through the process of going to the market early morning, getting the freshest produce, coming back and cooking. It has been a healing process for me," says Prasanna.

"At the one dish that I could not get myself to making is the brain omelette she made with relish. I'm not brave enough to cook it for now." Her own love for cooking stands shaped by the delicious wafts from the kitchen, the cheerfulness and love that her mother poured into the recipes as she served the food to everyone.

Any eclectic detours that Prasanna has made herself? "Usually I cook locally grown produce, but I just brought in last obscure thing would be loddly while making appams." "I learnt of widsom?" "I believe in American restaurateur Guy Fieri's words – "Cooking is all about people. Food is maybe the only universal thing that really has the power to bring everyone together. No matter what culture, everywhere around the world, people eat together," she says. All recipes below are taken from the author's cookbook Ammi.

STEAMED LENTIL BALLS IN TAMARIND GRAVY

This is a quintessential South Indian dish bursting with spice and tanginess and is one of my favorites. Prep time 10 min, cooking time 45 min, serves 4-6

Ingredients: 2 tsp oil ¼ kg Bengal Gram

METHOD

Soak Bengal gram in water for 30 minutes. Drain the water and then grind to a paste without adding water. Add salt and mix well, then roll into small lemon-sized balls and steam them in a steamer (Idli steamer will do). Grind the grated coconut flakes to a smooth paste. Fry the onions, curry leaves, 4 slit green chilies, 1 finely chopped tomato, cardamom, cloves, turmeric and coriander powder. Add water and coconut paste, boil for about 10 minutes and then simmer till the gravy is semi-thick. Add the steam balls and boil for another 10 minutes. Garnish with coriander leaves.



PEPPER MASALA MUTTON CHOPS

I can't remember a single time when mutton chops in pepper masala came out tasting less than perfect. Dad and my nephew Anush are testimony to that since we wouldn't have a peep from them until every last morsel on their plates was devoured. Prep time 10 min, cooking time 40 min, serves 6-8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg mutton chops
- 2 onions
- 4 tomatoes
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 14 cup oil
- 1 cup coconut milk
- ¼ tsp turmeric powder
- 2 tsp black pepper powder
- 2 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp coriander powder
- 1 tsp ginger garlic paste
- a few curry leaves
- a few coriander leaves
- Salt to taste



METHOD

Wash and rub a little pepper chili, turmeric, ginger-garlic paste and a little salt into the mutton and set aside for 30 minutes. Pressure cook the mutton to 3 whistles with 1 cup of water. Finely chop the onions and tomatoes. Heat the oil and fry the onions, saute for a few minutes and then add the remaining ginger-garlic paste. Saute and add the chopped tomatoes, chili powder, coriander powder and garam masala. Cook for 5 minutes, add the coconut milk and the chops. Cook till tender and when the masala is dry add pepper and the curry leaves. Serve with rice or Idliappams.

TANJORE CHICKEN PEPPER FRY

Wash and cut the chicken into small pieces. Finely chop the onions. Dry grind the pepper, coriander, turmeric and the dry red chillies into medium pieces. Pour the oil in a deep frying pan or Kadai and fry the chicken, cloves, cardamom, curry leaves, peeled garlic and onions till golden brown; add the ginger-garlic paste, broken red chillies, salt and turmeric. Add the chicken and fry for 2-3 minutes and then add half a cup of water; cover and cook on low flame. Keep stirring until it is drier and cooked.

Dad had a special liking for all dishes cooked in the style of his hometown, so naturally this recipe featured at the top of his best food list. Prep time: 10min, Cooking time: 30min, Serves: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg chicken
- 2 tsp ginger-garlic paste
- 100 gm peppercorns
- 1/4 cup oil
- 1/4 tsp turmeric powder
- 1/4 tsp dry red chillies
- 2 onions
- 1 pool peeled garlic
- 5 cardamoms
- 5 cloves
- 1 inch cinnamon stick
- a few curry leaves
- Salt to taste

Note: you can use the same method for mutton pepper fry. You may also add 2 cups of coconut milk after adding the chicken mutton for a different flavor.