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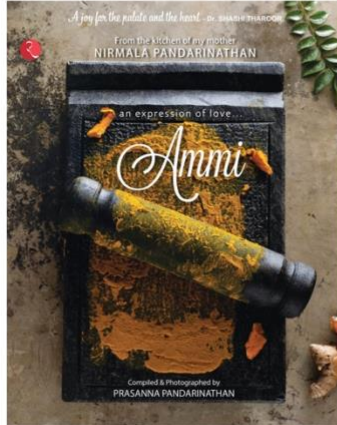
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A Culinary Tribute From Daughter to Mother

With tons of 'hand-me-down' recipes that are the greatest treasure a daughter could receive, *Ammi* is more than a loaded cookbook. Author, Prasanna Pandarinathan takes you into her life, page by page, ingredient by ingredient

Text: Farzana Contractor



The title of the book which says, *Ammi* and has a dedication on the cover, 'An expression of love... from the kitchen of my mother, Nirmala Pandarinathan', could easily mean the author has titled the book after her mother. But no, *Ammi* in Tamil is short for *amma* (aunt), what the cover picture portrays, a grinning stone. We love it. The pun and the beautifully chiselled all hints. There are many in the office of *UpperCrust*, who still have a grinning stone in use in their kitchen. So we approve. Grinding masala on these stones certainly retains all the beautiful aromas and doesn't burn out the ingredients being ground, as it does tend to in fancy food processors.

That said, let us tell you what we think of the cookbook. It's fabulous. The content has indeed been put together by author and daughter, Prasanna Pandarinathan with as much love and thought as her mother cooked for her throughout her life. "This cookbook is about cooking for one's family and friends as much as it is about eating with them," says Prasanna, who was once a model, called Pravy with love, and you do learn more about her in the afterword written by another model and



friend, Malika Aroor who once adorned the cover of *UpperCrust* and is certainly a foodie.

Clearly this book is a project and product of love. Both ways, from mother to daughter over the years of exemplary cooking and feeding, and daughter now, after her mother has passed away, putting together the book, steeped in nostalgia and gratitude for the love she received.

Glancing through the recipes, you think, 'Ah, this is quite an eclectic mix' and then you understand why. Born into a Tamil business family, the creator of these wonderful recipes grew up in Singapore, amidst a melting pot of culture and cuisines, since these were Colonial times, Indian, Malaysian, Chinese, Indonesian and European influences.

Once married, at the age of 19, she moved to London to be with her husband who was completing his master's in Engineering at Imperial College. With time at hand and *Le Cordon Bleu* cooking school in the vicinity, a novice at cooking at the time, young Nirmala, actually made her debut in the kitchen nudging up Continental cuisine! What more could a

new cook want than learning the basics, based on French cooking? A very sound start, indeed.

But at heart is always home-cooking and soon Nirmala was calling her cooks in Singapore for ingredients and she got into cooking traditional food, too. From there on it was a free run and a super new cook was born!

"That's where her saga of expressing love through cooking came about and continued throughout her life; at first for her husband, then children and then grandchildren!" says Prasanna.

The book has 108 recipes divided into nine sections: Vegetables, Eggs, Poultry, Meat, Seafood, Breads, Soups & Grills, Rice and Noodles, Pickles & Chutneys and Desserts. The repertoire of recipes spans the entire gamut of places where Nirmala has lived and been influenced by. So from a sticky *Sandek* and *Banana Bismie* from Chennai, you have grilled chicken called *Singapore Jumbo Piggan* (Chicken) which, though a local favourite in Singapore, is actually a dish from Indonesia! Then there is a *London Chicken Curry*, an Irish

Stew and *Shepherd's Pie*, no doubt influenced by the cook's days in England. Since Nirmala's mother hailed from Rameswaram you find a fish recipe called *Thunus Fish Curry*, in memory of her ancestral home and the local Thunus fish market, which would be her first stop when she arrived there. The simple ones that Prasanna has added at the start of each recipe add to the charm, but if only she had captioned the numerous family pictures interspersing throughout, the book would have lost more meaning. Clearly, this is a very informal and homely kind of cookbook, where the person compiling it has also indulged in her own sense of being a photographer, foodlover and fancy free. A palm tree, a field bathed in dawn, a fisherman casting a net, egg shells and onion skins, a deity on the beach... Prasanna is a model-turned-photographer - she did a short course in photography in New York, where she lives, especially to help herself compile this book. Food was cooked and shot at the home of a chef-friend there. An effort worth appreciating, all for the love of *Ammi*.

Bell Peppers Stuffed with Mince

Ingredients

- 4 bell peppers • 3 cloves garlic • 250 g mince (beef, mutton, lamb or chicken) • 1 ginger piece • 1 tbsp oil • 2 spring onions • 1 cup cheese (Mozzarella or Cheddar) • 1 celery stick • 1 lemon • 1 onion • 3 green chillies • salt to taste • 1 tsp butter

Method

Wash the meat and drain. Chop the onion, garlic, ginger, spring onions, green chillies and celery stick finely. Grate the lemon rind. Cut the bell peppers into half and scoop out the seeds. Rub the butter inside and outside. Heat oil, add the onions, ginger-garlic paste and salt, sauté and add the green chillies along with the mince. Cook till the mince is cooked, add the spring onions and celery stick and the lemon rind. Cook till dry. Spoon this mixture into the bell pepper halves. Add cheese on top and grill till it melts and the peppers are slightly crunchy.



Spicy Chili Crab

Ingredients

- 1 kg crabs • 250 g dried prawns • 2 spring onions (green ends only) • 2" ginger piece • 6 cloves garlic • juice of 2 limes • 100 g dried red chillies • 1 egg • 6 onions • 5 tomatoes • 1 tbsp ginger • 1 tsp dark soy sauce • Chopped parsley • 1 cup fish/chicken stock • 2" tbsp oil • salt to taste

Method

Soak the dried red chillies for 10 minutes. Grind them into a paste. Wash, clean and cut the crabs. Grind 5 onions, ginger and garlic into a paste. Drain the tomatoes. Finally cut 1 onion. Heat oil in a deep pan, fry the finely cut onion, add the onion and ginger-garlic paste, sauté well. Add 1/2 tomato paste, salt and sugar. Sauté and then add the chili paste. Cook for 10 minutes. Add the little juice and cook till the oil

separates. Add the crab pieces and dark soy sauce, cook till done. Soak the dried prawns in water for 2-3 minutes, wash well and then squeeze out the water. In a pan, fry the dried prawns crispy. Add the fried prawns to the crab gravy. Beat the egg and scramble it. Add it to the crab gravy and mix well, stir in chopped spring onions. Garnish with chopped Chinese parsley.



Minced Mutton Cutlets

Ingredients

- 1/2 kg minced mutton • 2 onions • 1 tsp turmeric powder • 4 green chillies • 1 tsp coriander powder • 2 bread slices • 2 tsp ginger-garlic paste • 1 egg • 2 cups water • 4 cups breadcrumbs • 1 spring coriander leaves • 3 cups oil • salt to taste

Method

Wash the mince and squeeze it dry. Soak the bread slices in water and squeeze out the water. Beat the egg. Finely chop the onions, green chillies, coriander leaves. Mix the onions, green chillies, ginger-garlic paste, coriander leaves, salt, turmeric powder, bread slices, and beaten egg into the mince. Mix well and divide into 10 to 12 portions. Shape into flat round cutlets and roll each one in breadcrumbs. Heat the oil and fry the cutlets on a low flame till golden brown.

Note

Use the same method for chicken mince, minced squid/prawns, crabs or semi-cooked fish.



Mom's Egg Curry

Ingredients

- 6 eggs
- 2 tbsp coriander seeds
- 1 tbsp fenugreek seeds
- 1/2 tsp mustard seeds
- 4 dry red chillies
- 6 green chillies
- 4 onions
- 1 tsp turmeric powder

- 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- 1 fresh coconut
- 2 springs curry leaves
- a few coriander leaves
- 3 tbsp oil
- salt to taste

Method
Hardboil the eggs, shell and set aside. Cut the onions and slit the green chillies lengthwise. Grate the coconut

and grind it to extract the milk. Roast the coriander seeds, red chillies and fenugreek seeds and grind them along with the onions. Heat the oil and fry the onion-masala paste, add ginger-garlic paste and fry till the oil separates. Add the green chillies and fry for 5 more minutes. Then add turmeric and one cup of water. Cover and cook for 15 minutes.

Add the coconut milk and cook on low flame till curry thickens slightly. Add the despoiled boiled eggs and cook for 5 minutes or till you achieve your desired consistency. In another pan, heat the oil, add mustard seeds, curry leaves and 2 whole red chillies. Fry till aromatic and add this to the egg curry. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves.



Black Rice Pudding

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup black rice/wild rice
- 3 cups water
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 2 tbsp cashew nuts
- 50 g jaggery (to taste)
- 3 powdered cardamoms

Method
Wash and soak the rice for 2-3 hours. Boil water, add the rice and cook till three-fourth is cooked. Add the coconut milk and jaggery. Stir well and cook for a few minutes. Lower the flame and cook till soft. Add the cardamom powder. Garnish with broken cashew nuts.



Shrimp Pickle

Ingredients

- 500 g shrimps
- 1 cup oil
- 100 g ginger-garlic paste
- 100 ml vinegar
- 1/4 tsp red chili paste
- 4 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp red chili powder
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp green chutney (optional)
- 5 green chillies
- salt to taste

For chili paste:
Roast 2 dried red chillies, 10 cloves garlic and a pinch of salt in 1/4 cup vinegar for 1 hour. Grind to a smooth paste.

Method
Shell, de-ven and wash the shrimps, then drain out the excess water. Heat 1/2 cup of water, add the shrimps,

add salt and cook on a medium flame till they shrimps are cooked. Add the ginger-garlic paste, chili paste and red chili powder. Add the green chutney and stir. Mix half the quantity of vinegar and cook for a minute. Then add half the quantity of oil and cook for 2 minutes. Add the sugar and stir well. Add the remaining vinegar and oil and cook for about 5 minutes.

Remove from the stove and cool before storing in a jar.
Note: To preserve the shrimp pickle for a few months, put 1 tsp of baking soda in 1/2 tsp of lukewarm water and add this to the pickle before removing it from the flame.



Prawn Biryani

Ingredients

- 3 cups biryani rice
- 500 g medium-sized prawns
- 1 tbsp ginger-garlic paste
- 1 tsp garam masala
- 3 tsp red chili powder
- 4 tbsp ghee
- 2 big onions
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 cloves
- 3 cardamoms
- 2 bay leaves
- 8 green chillies
- 3 tomatoes
- a few coriander leaves and a few mint leaves
- salt to taste

Method
Wash and de-ven the prawns. Chop the onions finely. Grind the green chillies, coriander and mint leaves into a paste. Wash and chop the tomatoes, break the bay leaves. Wash and cook the rice till it is three-fourth done, remove, drain and keep aside. Heat the ghee in a deep dish, add the chopped onions, ginger-garlic paste and sauté well. Add the chopped tomatoes, the ghee and masala paste and sauté. Add the red chili powder and whole masala and sauté. Add the prawns, sauté for a few minutes. Add the semi-cooked rice, mix well. Cover and cook on low flame for 10 minutes.





Chettinad Chicken Curry

Ingredients

- 1 large chicken + large coconut
- 2 large onions

For seasoning:

- 3 large onions + 2 large tomatoes
- 2" cinnamon stick (break into 4)
- 2 tsp chili powder + 4 tsp coriander powder + 2 tsp turmeric powder + 4 tsp ginger-garlic paste
- 2 tsp fenel seeds + 1 lemon-sized tamarind ball + 3 tsp sesame oil
- a few curry leaves and coriander leaves + salt to taste

Method

Cut chicken into 14 pieces, wash and rub some salt and turmeric and keep aside. Soak the tamarind for 10 minutes and extract the pulp. Grate and grind the coconut to extract 1.5 cups of thick milk and grind again to extract 1.5 cups of thinner milk. Keep aside.

Add ginger-garlic paste, chili powder, turmeric and coriander powder, fry for a few minutes. Add the tomatoes and fry for 5 minutes. Add the chicken pieces and fry well and add the thinner coconut milk. Cook and cook for 10 minutes, then add the thick coconut milk, cook until the chicken is tender. Add potatoes, wash, chop into four large pieces, add the tamarind pulp, simmer for 5 minutes. Garnish with chopped coriander leaves.

Stuffed Eggplants

Ingredients

- 8 small eggplants
- 3 tbsp oil + a few coriander leaves

For stuffing (grind the following)

- 1 tsp chili powder
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp mango powder (or lemon juice)
- 1/4 tsp fenugreek seeds
- 1/2 tsp turmeric powder
- 2 large onions
- salt to taste

Method

Wash and cut the eggplants dry. Sit each into four lengthwise, keeping the stem. Stuff them with the masala paste. Heat the oil and cook on low flame. Turn the eggplants carefully. Cook till they are soft and tender. Garnish with coriander leaves.



Noodles & Veggies in Coconut Sauce

Ingredients

- 250 g noodles + 2 cups veg stock + 2 tbsp red curry paste + 2 tbsp light soy sauce + 1/2 tsp white pepper
- 250 g Chinese cabbage + 1 cup coconut milk + 1/2 cup coriander leaves + 2 pods garlic + 2 tsp oil + half medium-sized broccoli + 2 carrots + 1 stalk lemon grass
- 1 sliced onion + salt to taste

Method

Peel, wash and cut the carrots into thin strips, and thinly slice the garlic. And onions, cabbage, make broccoli florets and mince the coriander leaves. Boil water in a deep pan and add a little salt and oil when it starts to bubble. Add noodles and cook for 5 minutes or till done, drain and set aside. Add the lemon grass and curry paste and stir-fry in oil for a few minutes. Add garlic, onions and cook over medium heat till light brown. Add the cabbage and carrot, stir for 5 minutes. Increase the heat. Add the coconut milk and vegetable stock, salt and white pepper. Boil and add the broccoli and stir in the soy sauce. Lower the heat and simmer for a few minutes before adding the cooked noodles and coriander leaves.



Curry Leaves Chutney

Ingredients

- 125 g Bengal gram (dal)
- 1 lime-sized tamarind ball
- 2 bunches curry leaves
- 15-20 red chilies
- 1 toothpick, grated finely
- 1/2 tsp salt (or to taste)

Method

Roast the dal till brown and grind it into a powder. Set aside. Roast the coconut, when half done add the red chilies and curry leaves. Roast till completely dry. Make a paste and add salt and tamarind milk to this paste with the powdered dal. Store in an airtight jar.

Ridge Gourd Chutney

Ingredients

- 400 g ridge gourd
- 1 lime-sized tamarind ball
- 10 dried red chilies
- 1/2 coconut, grated
- a few curry leaves
- 2-3 tsp oil
- salt to taste

Method

Wash and remove the skin from the ridge gourd. Grind the gourd and keep the pulp aside. Wash the tamarind and extract the pulp. Heat some oil and fry the ridge gourd skin, grated coconut, tamarind pulp and dried red chilies. Add the salt and curry leaves, sauté well. Cook and grind to a smooth paste.

Note

Don't discard the remaining ridge gourd as it can be made into a delicious poriyal (vegetable side dish).



Sweet Mango Pachadi

Ingredients

- 2 cups chopped raw (green) mango + 1/2 cup powdered jaggery + 1 tsp rice flour, mixed with 3 tsp water + 1/4 tsp turmeric powder + salt to taste

For tempering

- 1 tsp mustard seeds + 2 red chilies + a few curry leaves
- a pinch of asafoetida + 2 tsp oil

Method

Heat the jaggery till it thickens, then strain and put aside. Wash the raw mango well, trim the edges and chop it into cubes. Discard the seeds. Put the chopped mango in a pan of water till it is immersed. Let it cook for a few minutes until the pieces soften. Add the jaggery syrup. Let it cook for 5 minutes and simmer. Add salt. When the mangoes are nicely blended with the jaggery syrup, begin tempering simultaneously. Heat the oil in a deep pan. Add the mustard seeds, red chilies, asafoetida and curry leaves till the ingredients begin to sputter. Take the pan off the fire and set it aside to cool. Add the rice flour paste and let it boil on a slow flame for 2 minutes. Then add the tempering, mix well and take off the stove again.