

Prasanna Pandarinathan with her late mother Nirmala. The former started working on the book over five years ago, as she knew it would take time to sift through hundreds of recipes



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Prasanna Pandarinathan

Adhirasam

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg raw rice
- 500 gm jaggery
- 3 cardamom, crushed
- 2 tsp sesame seeds
- 5 tbsp ghee/oil

METHOD

Wash and soak the rice for two hours, spread it on a cloth and set it to dry for about one hour till it is semi-dry. (The rice should have moisture content.) Grind the semi-wet rice coarsely. Mix the cardamom powder and sesame seeds to it. Melt jaggery to a thick gel-like consistency (to test, drop a teaspoon of it into cold water—it should sink, not dissolve). If you pass this stage, the ball will become hard and adhirasams will also become hard. Add the rice flour and keep stirring well without any lumps. Transfer the mix into an airtight container and keep at room temperature for a day or refrigerate to last for a week. Make small flat rounds coated with clarified butter. Heat oil and fry till golden brown.

Lentil dumplings in coconut gravy

INGREDIENTS

- 100 gm black lentil
 - 100 gm Bengal gram
 - 20 gm green gram
 - 1 tsp carom seeds
 - 1 tsp baking soda
 - 3 tsp oil
 - 4 green chillies
 - Salt to taste
- For gravy**
- 2 onions
 - 2 cups tomato puree
 - 1 cup water
 - 1 tbsp garlic paste
 - 2 cups coconut milk
 - 1-2 tbsp red chilli powder (depending on taste)
- For seasoning**
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
 - 1 tsp black lentils (urad dal)
 - 2 tbsp oil
 - A few curry leaves

METHOD

Soak the dals overnight and grind them to a paste. Add baking soda and salt to the paste and mix well. Roll the paste into little dumplings. Heat oil and fry medium-sized dumplings on medium flame. Set aside. For gravy, mince the onions, fry



till golden brown and grind to a paste. Heat the oil in a pan, add the onion paste, garlic paste, tomato puree and chilli powder. Add water, bring to a boil and add coconut milk. Boil for 10 minutes. Place the dumplings in a serving bowl and pour the gravy over them. For seasoning, heat the oil. Add mustard seeds, black lentil and curry leaves. Pour over the gravy in the bowl. Serve with rice.

Super, mom!

From baked crabs and biryani to black rice pudding, Ammi is a rich assortment of treats and traditions penned by model-turned-photographer Prasanna Pandarinathan in memory of her late mother

NASRIN MODAK SIDDIQI

A PASSIONATE cook, Nirmala Pandarinathan loved experimenting with an array of cuisines and would deftly put together a pot-pourri of simple and ingenious dishes for the family, remembers her daughter and model-turned-photographer Prasanna Pandarinathan. Interspersed with images of long-forgotten memories and family anecdotes, Ammi (Rupa Publications) is a warm and absorbing introduction

keema kumbing and fish puttu with moringa leaves, the recipes represent the diversity and depth of South Indian food, Southeast Asian cuisines, and the bakes and grills from the West that were everyday meals in her mother's kitchen.

Born into a Tamilian business family, Nirmala's tryst with food began in colonial Singapore where she was raised, and exposed to a mix of Indian, Malaysian, Chinese, Indonesian and European cultures. Married at 19, she moved to London



to the life of Nirmala. The cookbook contains 108 recipes—most being her and her father's favourites and some other family specials. From banana blossom vadas to kari



Adhirasam is a traditional South Indian sweet made by deep frying the rice flour and jaggery mix dough after flat rolling it into a round shape

with her husband and joined the famous Cordon Bleu Cooking. "She began learning because she had time on hand. It was here that my mother's love affair with traditional French cuisine and its techniques began. She even made regular calls to her family cooks in Singapore to pick up the little secrets of spicy Chettinad, Singaporean, Malay delicacies," says Pandarinathan.

The saga of expressing love through cooking continued throughout her life. Her home was an open house, where the aromas of whatever was being crafted in her kitchen first greeted visitors. "At local markets, she was like a child in a candy store with her eyes twinkling at the very sight of fresh produce, varieties of meat and other local offerings. Her relationship with food was all about unique experiences, magical moments and immeasurable grams of love," she shares.

In Tamil, Ammi is short for Ammi Kallu, a traditional South Indian stone grinder, a striking image of which is used on the book cover. Her mother used it for the slow-grinding of chutneys and the masalas on the stone as it brought out the flavours, oils and spice, combining them and giving them a beautiful, soft texture that is difficult to achieve with a ma-



A pickle jar that Nirmala had bought from Chettinad

chine. After living in many countries, Pandarinathan has now made New York her home. "The best way to preserve my mother's memory was to document her recipes and share them with the world. Cooking, for her, was a catharsis and she emoted via food. It was also a promise I made to her that I will document her recipes and get them published."

Pandarinathan started working on the book over five years ago, as she knew it would take time to sift through hundreds of recipes and select the ones that would best convey the story of her mother and her family. "Since the book came about from a promise I made to my mother, I used to follow up with her to write her recipes, post which I start-

Stuffed fish masala

INGREDIENTS

- 6 medium pomfret or mackerel
- 3 tbsp garlic paste
- 3-4 tbsp red chilli powder
- 1 tsp cumin powder
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- ¼ cup vinegar or lemon juice
- 1 tbsp tamarind pulp
- Salt to taste
- Oil

METHOD

Wash and clean the fish well. Slit it from the side for stuffing. Rub the fish with salt and lemon juice and keep aside. Grind all the above ingredients with vinegar/lemon juice. Stuff the fish with the masala and rub some on the outside as well. Fry till golden brown. Serve with rice.

ed editing 400-odd handwritten recipes and doing the selections, which went back and forth. I had 108 recipes in mind, for the final book. During this process, I started studying food photography in New York City and started taking photos and writing down memories and anecdotes, as well as testing and re-testing the recipes. I met many people along the way, as I focused on creating and finishing the book. It was also challenging looking for the right publisher, as I wanted to work with someone who would really understand the message I was hoping to convey through the book. It's been a fulfilling, educative, challenging and rewarding experience," she adds.

While Pandarinathan was cu-

rating the final selection of images for the book, she already knew what she wanted, as far as the look and feel of the book were concerned, as well as paper quality and the book size. "That helped me finalise the aesthetic direction that I wanted to take the book in." She further adds, "It took time to photograph so many recipes and make all the food, but eventually it's all come together quite well. I didn't feel the need to include captions. The images are so striking in themselves that I felt they spoke to the reader without any intervention. After all, as they say, a picture is worth a thousand words."

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