



**26 FAVOURITE FOODS
&
A LITTLE BIT OF ME**

by Mayuri Nidigallu

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About the Author

Mayuri Nidigallu is a Tarot Card Reader by Profession and a Writer by design. Since she is already aware of what the future holds, she enjoys unwrapping the present.

Mayuri has been a Magazine Columnist and Freelance Writer and you can now read her Creative Writing, Reviews, Travelogues, Recipes and Food Stories on her site, Sirimiri – The Lifestyle Blogazine at www.sirimiri.in.

Mayuri is a Punjabi, born and brought up in Bombay, married to a Telugu, and shuttles between Chennai, Bangalore and Mumbai.

Her palate has tasted a lot of flavours and eaten food with unpronounceable names (wait to read her post for the letter P to find out more) and relished its food journey.

Join her as her chapters make inroads through her memory and moments with Food, in alphabetical order no less!

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Big thanks to everyone who read my posts, shared them and commented.

Saving the best for last, I give credit to all that I am and all that I know to my parents, Shakti and Subhash, who provided me and my siblings with roots to ground us and wings so that we could fly higher than we imagined we could.

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A is for Adhirasam

Adhirasam is a traditional sweet from the Tamil Nadu region of India. This deep fried delicacy is usually made on Diwali, weddings and auspicious days in homes and in Temples and offered to the Gods as prasadam.

Looks are certainly deceptive when it comes to an Adhirasam, as this stodgy looking soft Puri may not look aesthetically appealing but once you bite into a well-made one, you'll find yourself reaching for another, and another, and one more, calories be damned!

Rice Flour and Jaggery are always the core ingredients used to form the dough, which is kneaded after a careful procedure. Additions to the dough differ, as my Aunt-in-laws add Sesame seeds to it while others add Cardamon Powder or even Ginger Powder to it. In some recipes even the Jaggery is substituted with Sugar.

The original Adhirasam though remains my all-time favorite, rich and comforting. As I bite into its sweet goodness I am transported to happy occasions and auspicious moments and an imaginary fragrance of incense, the sounds the tinkling of bangles and echoes of laughter from the Poojas I first ate it at surrounds me. Every food I eat or have eaten is connected to a memory and I love the spiritual and happy memories I have associated with Adhirasam. Since it takes a lot of precision to make it, I am a bit hesitant to attempt making it myself, but perhaps one day I shall.

I had an Arranged Marriage. An Arranged 'Inter-caste' marriage, if you please. I am a Bombay born and bred Punjaban married to a Chennai based Telugu. Yes, crazy things do happen!

And do you know what is the biggest Adjustment one needs to make when one gets married, that too an Arranged Marriage?

It is Food!

Your cuisine, your timings, your food habits, everything changes, and in my case drastically! Pre marriage I was a daily Roti and rarely Rice eater whose usual Lunch time was 12:30 and

Dinner time was 8:00. Post marriage Rice was had for lunch, EVERYDAY, and lunch time was 2:30! I was horrified, and very, very hungry!

So there we were, my growling stomach and I, looking at the clock every second, willing it to inch forward, which it obviously didn't. With eyes glued to the barely moving clock I would drink enough water to irrigate about 10 fields.

Why didn't I ask for an early lunch you wonder? Well, I was a new bride, in a new household, with new people who spoke a new language.

So what did I do?

I Adapted.

B is for Belgavi Kunda

Belagavi Kunda was a sweet that was created accidentally, when a sweet maker left a large quantity of milk on the stove and forgot to switch off the flame. The Milk continued to boil for hours till it formed a brown mass. The Sweet maker returned after a while, to his 'mistake' ,and liked what he tasted. He modified it by adding sugar to it and decided that this brown mass would be a sweet and named it Kunda, after his daughter.

Belagavi Kunda is also known as Belgaum Kunda as it originated from the Belgaum region of North Karnataka. Interestingly enough it was created by Rajashthani cooks, called Purohiths, who had migrated to Belagavi more than 6 decades ago.

The preparation of Kunda requires a few ingredients and a lot of muscle power, as you need to keep stirring it without a break until it is done. The effort is more than worth it, as, besides toned arms, you get the grainy softness and sweetness of the Milk that has now formed into a solid with the delicate hint of caramel from the caramelized sugar that gives it its earthy colour. The Kunda is a very comforting sweet and tastes best when warm or at room temperature. Each time I make it I remember the sweet maker, whose mistake gave us this delicious treat. Not all mistakes are bad, are they? Here is my recipe of Belgavi Kunda <http://sirimiri.in/2015/05/07/belgaum-kunda/>

My Blog turns a teenager this May! Yes, I complete 13 years of Blogging in 2017!

I had 8 different blogs when I started. Along the way I lost interest in some while I gave extra attention to the others. In September 2016 I made an impulsive decision and went self-hosted and Deliciously Alive - my blog morphed into Sirimiri, my site.

Last month I added my Food and Travel blogs to this one and Sirimiri is now a Lifestyle Blogazine.

13 years is a long journey and I am happy to have experienced the changes in the blogging world along the way. From writing being the most important aspect of Blogging to your blog ranking being more important than your writing, I have ridden this carousel that has stopped at various points and showed me different sights, as I enjoyed both, the sights and the ride. Newer changes are always exciting to know and learn. Some are fads while others stay. Evolving with changes around, in the blogging world or otherwise, is the best way to be for me. Updating myself, like I update my apps, keeps me going. I am thrilled when people read my work and tell me they resonate with it. I am thrilled when I see my Blog stats, ranking, likes and comments. I am thrilled when I make new friends through blogging. I am thrilled at the aspect of monetization through my blog. I am thrilled when I meet horrible people and have painful experiences too, as they are just more fodder for characterisations for future stories. Yes, they are!:) I am thrilled to have experienced the good, the bad and the ugly side of Blogging as it has taught me what not to do and what to do often.

Oh, I am thrilled all right to learn new things and adapt to the changes, and wise enough to realize that these are frills and fancies and the real joy of Blogging is, was and will always be good Writing and Reading.

C is for Chaat

A Chaat is a savory snack typically a street food, well-loved and found all over India. A host of ingredients are put together and seasoned with the most delicious of Chutneys, the tastes of which range from spicy to sour to sweet to tangy and the coming together of all the ingredients forms a Chaat. Bhel Puri, Paani Puri, Sev Puri, Dahi Puri and more are the various names given to a Chaat.

Names and tastes may differ according the States you may have it in but the joy they bring remain the same. Call it by whatever name you want to but the first reaction the mention of a Chaat will evoke is a wide smile.

Like many other people I associate Paani Puri with a happy occasion, eating it with friends, competing who could eat the most, laughing aloud if someone's Puri broke midway to its journey into the cave of the mouth.

It was a rite of passage when you could gobble a whole Puri packed with mashed Potatoes and Moong or Chana and dripping with the spicy water. Eyes watering, hissing away as we eat one spicy part at a time, getting it modified by the ever patient 'Bhaiyyas' who dole them out, indulging in Chaat even as you are discussing where you ate the best one or the worst one and what the current plate in front of you is lacking would be the done thing, this talk is almost an accompaniment!

When we moved to Bangalore from Mumbai I missed my Chaats the most, till careful research and lots of trials and errors later we found places that serve the purpose, if not the most authentic taste.

A Chaat is a meal for me, and contrary to what anyone might say or believe, Mumbai has the most delicious Chaat's anywhere in India, and in Mumbai, my Mum makes the best ones.

Whenever I visit home it is an unsaid rule there there will be Chaat for dinner on the day I arrive or for lunch the next day.

Most people think I am Calm, like the Buddha. Ha! Looks couldn't be more deceptive could they now?

I studied in Convent School, where I was calm meek. In fact most people from school only remember me because my name was so unusual and I was the only Mayuri in school. I didn't speak much then, at least not to everyone save for a few friends. I preferred to spend my time in the Library where I developed my reading habit, on in the Sewing Room thanks to which I love sewing and needle work and embroidery or with very few close friends. And I had a temper. Yes. A terrible, fly of the handle temper. I was also thoroughly spoilt, indulged, accommodated by a family full of Uncles and Aunts what with being the eldest niece.

Then one day I changed. I got bored of being me!

And from a dark cloud I turned into this cheery ray of sunshine!

So am I Calm? As I like to say, my facial features are calm, and I am anything but. I am alive! I am hyper! And fun! Also funny and eccentric and a bundle of energy! I am the exclamation of life! With so many flattering adjectives going around why would I want to be known as 'Calm?'

D is for Dal Dhokli

Dal Dhokli is a traditional dish from the Gujrat region of Western India. It is a one-pot, delicious and healthy meal. Wheat Flour and Gram Flour are mixed, seasoned with spices and kneaded into a dough. The dough is then rolled out into a medium thick roti which is then cut into strips.

The Dal cooked is a medley of flavors, spicy and tangy with a hint of sweetness and peanuts making frequent appearances. The strips of dough are cooked in this watery Dal and by the time they are done the Dal turns thick, and you have a delicious Dal Dhokli. One of the many advantages of growing up in Bombay were the cosmopolitan neighbors and friends and a Mom who loved to learn and cook different cuisines.

That was one reason we grew up eating a variety of foods. Whenever I tasted food that I liked I urged my mother to replicate the dish for me, and she did. When Mom made Dal Dhokli for the first time it was way better than the neighbor Auntys, whom she had learnt it from.

And now when I cook it now, Mom tells me that my Dal Dhokli is far better than hers. Dal Dhokli is one of my comfort foods. A bowl of this delicious dish and a book on the side makes for the perfect meal for me.

The mélange of flavors of this dish stirs up something akin in memory too, little flashbacks of my home city and home, of the innocence of childhood and the happiness that little things brought. Of my Mother cooking it and the heavenly aroma tantalizing my nostrils and taste buds, and as I relish every spoonful I walk down nostalgia lane again.

Here is my recipe of Dal Dhokli <http://sirimiri.in/2017/01/24/dal-dhokli/>

You know I absolutely abhor being referred to as Dear. Or Darling. Or any other term of endearment.

Why?

Honestly, it makes me feel like a Gangsters Moll! * Mona, Darling * and when you address me as such you remind me of Loin Ajit, the baddie all suited and booted in White, with a hideous ginger beard and hair.

Or, you remind me of wrinkled Aunties, enveloped in the fragrance of lavender/rose water/talcum powder who dear and darling everyone * yes, my memories associated are that detailed *

In fact, I abhor these endearments so much even my Husband has been forbidden from using them.

So you see it's not you, it's me!

I have such a lovely name, why wouldn't you want to address me by that? Or by my initial M. Like James Bond Lady Boss, M.

E is for Egg Kagina

Egg Kagina is a simple and versatile dish and a must try for Egg lovers. If you haven't already relished it, that is. This Omelette Pancake is quick to rustle up and can be eaten as a meal with parathas, as an accompaniment, enjoyed as an appetizer or works even just a snack. I enjoy it with good old white bread too.

Kagina is a traditional Persian dish and the name is a literal translation Kag is Egg and Ina is related to. It is also known as Ande ka Khagina in Hyderabad and is a popular breakfast dish there.

When I was learning to cook, The Husbands Aunt taught me to make Kagina, and I got it right the 1st time around. Which is why this dish is doubly special for me. I am not fond of eggs, at all. I usually like them in my hair, in a hair pack, but I always make an exception for Kagina.

The Kagina is also one of The Husbands favorite dish. It is made at least once a week at home and when I am at a loss about what to make for dinner this dish is my savior. Here is my recipe for Egg Kagina <http://sirimiri.in/2017/03/29/egg-kagina/>

I think to be happy one must be like water, moving, taking the shape or form of where you flow or are poured.

In other words, it is necessary to Evolve.

To change with change is something I have never regretted doing. The days gone by were good and the days to come would be even better is a thought that keeps me going. Clinging to the past or the old ways and not letting it go or letting things change assures a bleak future, and even more to complain about. The only way to move forward and to be happy is to Evolve.

I am a bundle of Excitement about everything, from learning how to work a new app or plugin to planning a holiday! And I am enthusiastic about helping as many people as I can and it whatever way I can.

That is the only way I know to Exist.

F is for Farsan

Farsan is the umbrella under which a whole list of delicious snacks come under.

Loved by Gujrati's, and more than Gujrati's by ME, these savory snacks are enjoyed with meals, with an evening cup of tea or coffee or just whenever you want to.

Farsan's can be deep fried, or freshly made or steamed or just dry items that can be stored for a few days and some even for a few weeks.

Dhokla, Bhajiya, Khandvi, Sev, Chakli's, Ghatiyas, tiny Samosas and Kachori's are a few form a long list.

I have never met anyone outside of Bombay who has even heard of the term Farsan, until and unless that person is a Gujrati. Farsans are appetite spoilers and so delicious that you cannot stop at one. I look forward to a Gujrati Thaali or an invite for a Gujrati wedding only for the mouth-watering Farsans served.

If there is anything I love more than my Family it is Food! And in food I love and enjoy the snacks and desserts more than I probably enjoy the main meals.

I grew up with a Dad who is passionate about food and a Mom who is not only a fabulous cook but someone who loves trying out new cuisines. Mom makes the best (veg) Dhan Shak, Varan, Undhiyo, Pasta, Moong Dal Barfi and Halwa among many other things.

Mom is a Rajasthani and Dad is a Punjabi and then we lived in Bombay, which ensured that our palette was acquainted with a host of flavors. Thanks to which I find it easy to adjust to and relish every kind of cuisine and I am not fussy about getting 'my food'.

Strangely the simple and everyday food I rejected while I was growing up, like our Sunday staples like Rajma and Chole, or everyday food like Masoor and Moong Dal and even vegetables like Tinda and Karela, I now find myself craving for. Sometimes I look to replicate the flavors that my Mom's cooking brought to the dishes while at other times I add a Telugu twist to my cooking and create a brand new flavor. The Further I soar from my home,

my hometown and my people the more I find myself digging in my roots. I wonder if this is what is called the circle of life.

G is for Ghewar

This sunny yellow, spongy disc, soaked in sugar syrup is a sweet traditionally associated with Rajasthan, a state in the Western region of India.

Ghewar is made on important Rajasthani festivals like Teej and Gangaur and gifted to married women, and sent to newly married daughters houses for their first festival celebrations, along with other gifts.

When I was growing up in Bombay buying Ghewar from a regular Sweet shop was impossible and someone either carried it for us from Rajasthan or we requested our regular Mithaiwala to source it for us. These days it is available all through the year and all through the country, unlike its former exclusivity.

Ghewar comes in many variations, Plain, with Malai and another version called Mawa Ghewar, each one more sinful than the other. It is melt in the mouth delicious always a harbinger of auspicious times.

The world is made up of Givers and Receivers. Then there are a balanced few who are Givers and Receivers, both.

Givers give and Receivers take, and over time both becomes habits. Habits which either people seldom realize and even when realization sets in those patterns become difficult to break. Giving and Receiving balances out the equation but when you are just either it causes a serious imbalance.

Over time I have learnt an important lesson. If you are a Giver who finds it difficult to receive, your energy, both mental and physical, depletion is faster. And since you are not a ready receiver your cup of giving runs dry more often. Apart from feelings of frustrations it causes a serious imbalance in the universe as well, and nothing should be left accounted for and without return.

The why's and wherefores behind this will require a different blogpost by itself but for now all we need to know is this.

It is great to Give and equally great to Receive. Doing either of them is good, but doing them together is even better. Giving and receiving need not be with the same person either. Let gratitude be a long chain where you are one of the links.

So, if a kindness has been done to you, pass it on to someone else, if you can't return it to the person who bestowed this kindness. If someone helped you, help someone else. If you learnt something, teach it to others.

And let the chain of giving and receiving wrap the Universe in Goodness.

H is for Handvo

We've all eaten a cake at least once in our lifetimes.

Tea cakes, cream cakes, fruit cakes, chocolate cakes and so on and so forth. How many of you though have eaten a savory cake, made up of vegetables, lentils, seasoned with spices and baked, making it a truly healthy snack or even meal?

*Well, let me introduce you to Handvo – or the Savory Vegetable Cake. Handvo is a native speciality of the western region of India – Gujrat * there are times I wonder if I was switched at birth, from a Gujrati family to mine, because I love the food so, so much! **

A mixture of Rice, Chana Dal, Moong Dal, Tur Dal is soaked overnight and ground the next day with curd. Bottle Gourd (Doodhi) and Methi leaves are added along with an assortment of Indian spices like red chilly powder, turmeric ginger and green chillies to flavor the mix along with pickle masala to give it that tangy taste.

A generous handful of Sesame Seeds and good stir later the Handvo mix is popped into the oven where it bakes at its own leisurely pace.

And while we wait for it to be done, we whip up a fresh green chutney made of Mint and Coriander Leaves with green Chilles thrown in. As the Chutney gets ready the Handvo gets done. Wait for it to cool, if you can that is, and cut yourself a generous wedge and enjoy! My description set your taste buds tingling? Make yourself Handvo by following my recipe here <http://sirimiri.in/2017/04/10/handvo-savory-cake/>

H is for Hate. And I Hate Cooking! Yes, you read right, I H.A.T.E it!

When I got married I did not know cooking at all. The first time I cooked a meal, my Dal was almost grey, my Subzi was purple, my Roti's were like Frisbees and I was in tears.

Then I realized that Maids are unreliable, my lack of cooking prowess had become the talk of familial gossip and discussion with each failure taking on phantom exaggerated proportions and I had a Husband who loved good food.

So what did I do? I decided to tame this monster called Cooking! Online recipes guided me and with each success I realized that cooking is not as big a deal as it is made out to be. Yes, right cooking may be a big deal though, where you use the minimal of oil and spices and still whip up delicious food.

I still can't get accustomed to the fact that I cook, and I don't enjoy doing so at all. I am still waiting for my inner Nigella Lawson to make an appearance and for me to feel good about it. Till then quick cooking will have to do.

I is for Iyengar Bakery Toast Sandwich

When we moved to Bangalore 3 years ago we discovered many interesting facets of this garden city. Iyengar Bakeries dotting it was one such facet.

Each Iyengar Bakery has a different story of origin to share; while some claim that an Englishman, a regular customer, taught an Iyengar family to bake bread, another claimed that Iyengars from Hassan, a town near Bangalore, moved to the city to start these bakeries. These days some Iyengar Bakeries are not even owned or run by the original Iyengars either. Initially all the products baked and sold were eggless but recent times see egg being incorporated in the goodies they sell.

The special feature of an Iyengar Bakery is that it's exhaustive list of products are fresh and baked each day.

There are buns, sweet and savory cookies, a must-try speciality Apple Cake, Tea Cakes that you can get addicted to and the freshest of bread, the loaves of which are sliced in front of you before they are wrapped up. Puffs and Sandwiches are other trademarks people make a beeline for.

Their Toast Sandwich is something The Husband is particularly fond of, and each time we pass our favorite Iyengar Bakery he is sure to pick one up for himself.

A lazy Sunday evening and a craving for the sandwich by The Husband prompted me to get into the kitchen and attempt to put one together. Even though I'd say so myself, it was pretty good! Put together an Iyengar Bakery Toast Sandwich for yourself following this recipe <http://sirimiri.in/2015/04/08/iyengar-bakery-style-toast-sandwic/>

Only my family and friends know this, so far, that I can imitate people extremely well! The funny bit is I don't even realise I have observed them or I am observing them so minutely, until I pick up quirks, gestures and words that help form the full picture! Family and friendly gatherings are a riot as my subtle imitations of people present either start on request or if the crowd and my mood is right. There is a fine line between imitation and ridiculing and I take care never to cross it. It is all in good fun, and I get imitated in return too though, just between you and me, most people do a terrible job of that!:(;))))

J is for Jackfruit Halwa

I absolutely love Jackfruit!

Isn't it ironical how such an unattractive looking and cumbersome to cut through lump can hold such a delicious and fragrant fruit inside? Summer is the season of Jackfruits and I relish it in its various forms.

When I saw Jackfruit Biryani on the menu on our visit to Kerala I promptly ordered it, and enjoyed every spoonful!

I love how versatile this fruit with the funny name, Jackfruit, is and how it can be used to dish up both sweet and savory dishes.

I went to the market last week and sight of the fragrance of jackfruit bulbs was too tempting to pass by and I returned home carrying a big bag of them. After enjoying a few I wanted to use the fruit in a different manner and after going through a few recipes online I decided to come up with a simple one and we had Jackfruit Halwa for our post dinner treat.

The health benefits of this fruit are so many as well that there is no reason to ignore it. I sometimes even dream of aiming one at the heads of people I don't like.....

I have something in common with Bappi Lahiri.

We are gold-mates, only thing is he doesn't know it, yet. Among many other things I love, I LOVE Jewellery!

Diamonds are certainly this girls BFF's, but my love for Gold is on par with that of Bappi Lahiri's, save for the fact that I refrain from wearing the contents of all my lockers together (thank god for small mercies!)

I love classic pieces of jewellery that stand the test of time, look good and are comfortable to wear. In fact there was a time when I was so disgruntled with readymade pieces on display at my jewelers that I used to design my own jewellery. Those pieces are cherished possessions now. Btw, I cannot understand women who don't like jewellery, I just cannot, and yes I know there are many.

Jutti's are another passion! Handmade jutti's from the Indian State of my roots, the magnificent Punjab, are the ultimate in comfort and style and an as yet untapped style quotient upper as far as I am concerned. I just wonder why more people don't wear them.

K is for Kada Parshaad

If you've ever visited any Gurudwara and have been lucky enough to come back with a cupped palm full of the Halwa they serve as Prasad to the visitors, chances are you've tasted Karha Prasad or Kada Parshaad as it is also known as.

This Wheat Flour Halwa got its name as it is cooked in huge vessels called Kadahi's. This decadent and delicious treat is usually cooked and served on auspicious occasions. A few years ago the craving for Karha Parshaad hit me real bad, and no Gurudwara was in the vicinity. That is when I sent out a message on all my whatsapps groups asking for a genuine tried and tested recipe for so I could whip up this delight. Half a dozen recipes came my way in the next 10 minutes, and among them was a recipe straight from a world famous Gurudwara. Off to the kitchen I went, and as I cooked up the parshaad my entire house filled up with the fragrance of roasted wheat flour and ghee and my heart was filled with glee, even as my taste buds began to salivate in anticipation. If you love Karha Parshaad, or have no idea what it is, you could follow my recipe here <http://sirimiri.in/2014/09/18/kada-parshaad/>

Thankfully being Kind is not an either-or strong reaction. You can either be kind, or not, or be something in between too. By something in between I mean you can be kind to people you want to be kind to, and unkind to people you don't. Do I see you rolling your eyes? Yes, such people do exist, and I know a lot of them. As long as Kindness exists in any form it does it's all good, don't you think? Kindness comes naturally to me, I call it a genetic trait. And when a situation or person does not arouse natural kindness I make an effort to create forced Kindness, no matter how I feel towards the person or situation. As Maya Angelou's quote, 'I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.' Is a mantra I live by.

L is for Langcha

I call Langcha the 'Amitabh Bachchan of Jamuns' as unlike it's round, softer North Indian cousin, the Gulab Jamun, the cylindrical Bengali Sweet Langcha stands tall and slim. The texture differs too, as it is firmer and not swimming in syrup, even though it oozes with it. Bengali Sweets have a special place in my heart and I love almost all the ones I have tasted so far, and believe me the list is long. The origin of the Langcha can be traced to Shaktigarh in the Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Made from Chenna, where milk is curdled and separated from the whey, and other additions this deep fried delight is a popular choice for auspicious and festive occasions, but of course I don't wait for those to savor it.

7 and a half years of being married to a Telugu and, as yet, I can only speak a few scattered words of the language to get by with. My favorite line being 'Telugu Maatla Chaala Kashtam' (which roughly translates to 'it is very difficult to talk in Telugu') This is the line that saves me each time even as it breaks the ice and manages to make disapproving looking Aattas (Aunts) break into a smile! Funnily enough without understanding the language completely or speaking it at all, I have managed to form a bond with so many people in our village whenever we visit. Apart from family, other relatives, family friends, neighbors to people who work for us to I communicate with them without uttering a single word of any language as they don't have a clue about Hindi and I you are already aware of my prowess in Telugu. Thankfully the universal language of love and care is much the same everywhere, even though spoken languages may vastly differ from people to people.

M is for Meethe Chawal

The literal translation of Meethe Chawal is Sweet Rice and they were cooked at home often when I was growing up. Whenever there was an occasion worth celebrating, or occasions were created when there were none, we had Meethe Chawal on the table. And in a joint family of 12 + people there were always reasons to celebrate, genuine or otherwise, believe me!

From school and college admissions to exams getting over, from India winning a cricket match to my Uncle's friend sister getting engaged, excuses were cooked up, so that Meethe Chawal could be cooked! :)

This simple and delicious dish is also known as Zarda Pulao. Basmati Rice should be used to bring out the best look and taste of this fragrant dish. Cardamom powder and dry fruits enhance its taste and my favorite dry fruit, Chironji, adds that crunch to the mouthful of sweetness savoring this dish would bring.

After Food and Travel my one big passion is Movies!

I love watching movies in the theatre, on the big screen. Once the lights go low, darkness wraps up the cinema hall and the movie begins, I forget the whole world. It is just me, the characters and the story that I become part of. I absolutely abhor talking, or people who talk, during a film.

I am that annoying person sitting in the next seat or two rows above you who will shush you if you talk during the film. People who talk loudly on the mobile get my death stare, if they are in visible distance of it. Good movies, bad movies, very bad movies I will watch them all even as I seek joy from them, grumble away at them or later curse them by writing a scathing review about them.

There is something magical about a story unfolding in front of you, and as it does a parallel story unfolds in my mind. The work of so many technicians, actors and of course the Captain of the Ship, the director, and me wondering how a certain shot must've been filmed or how the lyricist thought of certain lines for a said situation, or what must go through an actor's mind as they give a specific shot.

Does this explain why I like my peace and quiet and need full concentration to watch a film?

N is for Nolen Gurer Jolbhara Sandesh

Nolen Gurer is Date Palm Jaggery. The winter months from November to February are what I used to eagerly await, as those are the months that West Bengal produces Date Palm Jaggery.

Technology is a boon though, as these days Nolen Gurer Mishti's (sweets) are available all year round. The taste does differ slightly when Fresh Nolen Gurer is used and its hoarded up and preserved counterpart is used, and a discerning palate can taste the difference but as long as it is available all year round I am definitely not complaining!

My favoritest is the Nolen Gurer Jolbhara Sandesh, this brown version of Sandesh is very plain to look at but bite into it and wait for the dark brown Nolen Gurer to hit your palate and when it does the feeling is instant joy! The taste of Nolen Gurer is special, and you need to experience it to know what I mean.

No one believes I am a North Indian, a Punjabi to be precise.

I am always mistaken for being a Bengali, and the fact that I love the Bengali Mishti's (sweets) so much and wear a Shakha-Pola and Loha during Pujo time AND I am as excited about Pujo as any self-respecting Bengali would be doesn't help the cause.

If I am not mistaken for a Bengali, I am mistaken for a Malayalee, because of my 'dark and curly hair and shining eyes' is the explanation given, when asked.

To further complicate matters I am married to a Telugu, who looks like a North Indian :) So when people find out we are Chetan Bhagat's vice-versa version of 2 States they immediately assume and proudly point out that I must be the South Indian and The Husband must be the North Indian, till The Husband starts talking. After which all assumptions are put to rest.

I have no issues with people assuming whatever they wish to, it's fun actually as I do realise that I look nothing like a North Indian, it's more fun when after the bad guessing games when I tell people of my origins they turn around and say, 'Ah, yes you look like a North Indian actually.'

O is for Obbattu

Obbattu. Holige, Parpu Poli. Bobbatlu. Bobattu or Puran Poli as I know it as, from growing up in Bombay.

Many names, slight variations in the recipe and just the same deliciousness!

Obbattu is a delicious Roti/Flatbread stuffed plump with a mix of cooked Chana Dal and Jaggery with hints of powdered cardamom making a subtle appearance.

Cooked to crisp perfection with liberal splashes of Ghee, eating this delight hot off the Tawa/Pan makes it extra delicious. The flaky outer layer gives way to the soft and sweet stuffing inside that just melts in your mouth.

Maida or all-purpose flour is usually used to knead the dough that makes the outer layer but Mom makes it with whole wheat flour and I follow her recipe.

Obbattu comes in 2 versions, a very thin dry version, that you could store for anything between 7-10 days and the fresh version which should not be stored for more than a single day.

The dry version is eaten by dipping bits of it in ghee while the fresh version is cooked in ghee. Coconut is an addition to the Chana dal and Jaggery mixture in some recipes and I love that variation as well.

I have been Oil Pulling for about 2 and a half years now. What on earth is Oil Pulling is the question on your mind, right?

Oil Pulling is an ancient Ayurvedic technique that involves swishing a teaspoon of Oil in your mouth, the first thing on waking up in the morning. This is done on an empty stomach. Doing so draws out the toxins from your body, improves overall health and works wonders on dental health.

What do you do after swishing the oil in your mouth? You spit it out! And brush your teeth as you would each morning

It may sound a little crazy, but it is not. In the last 2 and a half years that I have been Oil Pulling I have visited a dentist only once, that too for a general checkup, which I passed with flying colors.

I use Sunflower Oil or Coconut Oil for my Oil Pulling and as I am swishing the oil in my mouth I finish my morning chores like watering my plants, boiling the milk, getting the tea and coffee ready. I feel fresh after I've brushed my teeth and through the day. Try it, you have nothing to lose.

P is for Putrarekulu

Putarekulu, or Poothareku as is it also known as, is the most unusual sweet I have ever seen or eaten. The origins of this sweet can be found in Atreyapuram, a village in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, in the Southern region of India.

A particular Rice Batter, Powdered Sugar and Ghee are the ingredients that make up this dish along with the most important ingredient, an inverted Clay Pot.

Yes, you read that right.

A clay pot is heated and rubbed with a cloth dipped in oil for 3 days, to smoothen its surface. The batter of the 3 ingredients is prepared and spread on the inverted and heated pot. The batter 'cooks' to form a gossamer thin film which makes the outer covering of the sweet. It is then stuffed with dry fruits or jaggery and intricately folded into a neat rectangle.

This rectangle does not weigh more than a tissue paper, and when bitten into, the Putarekulu just melts into your mouth.

For my Haldi ceremony ladies from my in-laws side came to our house bearing sweets, as is the tradition.

There were some usual ones like Laddu's and some unusual ones like Khajas and Putarekulu. The Husbands Uncle (Mama) is a foodie and he had ensured that the sweets native to Andhra were specially prepared for the occasion.

After the ceremony we remembered the sweets and were most curious about the unique looking Putarekulu. We picked one, and were surprised at how incredibly light it weighed. Then we began unravelling it, thinking the outer layer to be some kind of butter paper or tissue paper. We kept unravelling this delicate sweet till we were left with the sparse dry fruit and jaggery filling, the quantity of which was barely that of a tablespoon.

How strange, we thought to ourselves and gingerly tasted the dry fruits, that to be honest didn't taste like much. We clumsily 're wrapped' the 'tissue paper' and kept it aside.

The next day when The Husband (then fiancée) asked me what we thought of the Putarekulu I told him 'how the shopkeeper had probably packed the wrong sweets' and sheepishly explained what we did.

To which he had a hearty laugh, and told me about the Putarekulu.

Till date this is a big joke in his family and till date my family cannot remember or pronounce the tongue twister of a name and we refer to it as the 'Tissue Paper Sweet'.

Q is for Qurma

The goodness of vegetables, a taste that is not like the ordinary and a dish that saves my skin on many occasions. When I don't know what to cook for dinner or I am one dish away from finalizing the menu for a party this Qurma is what comes to the rescue.

I have tweaked the basic recipe in so many different ways that it tastes and looks different each time.

When this Qurma is a dish for a party menu I add Cream or Coconut Milk and I have a rich tasting gravy. Minus the tomatoes (when I am out of them) and the Qurma tastes different. Add Kasuri Methi, or not, and the taste changes again. Let your imagination run wild even as your taste buds tingle with each new twist to taste. Want to make Qurma for your next meal? Here is the recipe <http://sirimiri.in/2012/08/30/vegetable-korma/>

Being a woman is fun!

Being a quirky woman is a lot more fun!

I have always believed that being quirky or having quirks, that don't irk, is a sign of confidence. When you're sure of what you are and enjoy being you, no matter what anyone thinks that's when you can pat yourself on your back and say, you've done well, girl!

I stack currency in my purse according to descending denominations in my wallet, and I have a separate Coin purse as well.

My Handbag carries everything, except the kitchen sink. I stopped carrying a mini sewing kit after it being confiscated many times at airports * grin *

My borderline OCD, because of which I can't write a single word till my home is spic and span.

My habit of standing up for and rooting for the Underdog even though I have been brutally bitten in return by the same 'Underdog' * wider grin *

And, yes, crossing my fingers and making a wish when I see a red postal van and only uncrossing my fingers when I see a black car in motion * grin graduates to a guffaw imagining the horrified expression on you, my readers, face * Learnt this quirk in school, only problem is there are fewer postal vans around these days.

R is for Rajma

I wouldn't be a Punjabi worth my salt if I didn't mention Rajma in my list of favorite foods would I now!

If you've ever had a Punjabi neighbour, chances are that multiple whistles of a pressure cooker would have woken you up on the one Sunday you got to sleep in.

Because Sunday lunch in most vegetarian Punjabi houses means Rajma-Chawal or Chole-Chawal or Kaali Dal-Chawal. A Boondi Raita and lots of sliced Onions were the usual accompaniments, which meant collective onion breath and everyone sleeping off the lunch till evening.

The secret of getting your Rajma to taste just the right Punjabi type is in buying the right Rajma (buy the big purplish red ones) slow cooking it on a low flame, after the beans have cooked through, with a big dollop of ghee added to it as it slow cooks. My Mum has never used any special Rajma Masala while making hers and neither do I.

When I turned a teenager I shunned all typical Punjabi food, so while the family ate Rajma I would be eating Toast or just the Boondi Raita. This shunning of Punjabi food continued way past my teens, till I married a South Indian.

Now some Sundays see my neighbour been woken up by my pressure cooking whistling away as my Rajma cooks.

While my Dad is a Punjabi Mum is a Rajasthani. No, it wasn't a love marriage it was a traditional arranged marriage as both the families had one thing in common, they were both Brahmins.

Yes, Punjabi Brahmins do exist * grin *

So growing up we had a mix of both the cultures in terms of festivals, celebrations and of course food. Once again I shunned every food that was Rajasthani, be it the delicious Gatte ki Sibzi or the Ker Sangri or the Kanji Wada.

Marriage outside the community has brought me closer to both the cultures I ran away from. My husband loves Gatte ki Subzi and I love cooking it for him. My hand automatically

reaches out for a Bandhni or Lehariya saree for any special occasion and I keep track of all the festivals be it Teej, Gangaur or Baisakhi and celebrate them in my own way.
Realization: Sometimes you need to move away from something to get closer to it.

S is for Sattu

How many of you have heard of and tasted Sattu?

Well, for those who haven't, Sattu is nothing but roasted Bengal Gram Flour and no it is not Besan .

In my humble opinion Sattu is also the the most underrated flour in India, despite it being the most versatile.

It is packed with protein, it is an instant coolant, a great source of insoluble fiber and with a low glycemic index it is perfect for Diabetics.

Enough of the Nutrition lessons though! See these Sattu ke Laddus? I made them in exactly 15 minutes, no kidding! You could too, if you follow my recipe here.

Apart from making super delicious laddus, Sattu stuffed Parathas taste simply awesome as well.

And with summers beating down upon us mercilessly, discard your fizzy, sugary aerated drinks and cool down instantly with a simple and quick Sattu drink made by mixing it with Jaggery and water and a dash of lime. Use Sattu to give body to your chutneys and gravies without the guilt of unwanted calories, a great substitute for Coconut in both.

And mind you, these are just a few uses of Sattu! Make yourself some Sattu Laddu's, which are nothing even close to Beasan Laddu's btw, following my recipe here

<http://sirimiri.in/2017/01/01/sattu-ke-laddu/>

When I discover something good I have this pressing need to Share it.

Immediately, and with as many people as I can!

And I do.

The funny thing is some people get Suspicious, namely about why I am sharing something and then the question that makes people fall in my eyes faster than the Sensex does after Trump makes an announcement is asked, 'What are YOU getting out of it?'

Ewwwww, what an off puter! The thought process behind the question disgusts me!

I can't decide whether people have become suspicious or selfish, or both. Or does being selfish make one suspicious or is it vice versa?

And if helping out people by sharing something is going to be looked upon dubiously and then questioned I feel really sad for this world, and a little bit for myself as well.

T is for Thaalipeeth

Growing up in Bombay meant enjoying a lot of Maharashtrian food, among many other cuisines. When I was a little girl, we had a cook called Gangubai who made us the most delicious Thaalipeeth, which is nothing but a super healthy, easy to make Roti.

Thaalipeeth is a combination of 3 different Flours, Wheat Flour, Gram Flour (Besan) and Bajra Flour which are mixed together. Chopped Onions, chopped Green Chillies, fresh Coriander, some chopped Ginger, Salt to taste and a little bit of Oil are added to the Flours. Add Dahi (Yogurt) and knead it into a dough, adding water as required.

Keep this dough aside for about 20 minutes, knead it once more and roll out slim Roti's and cook by sprinkling a few drops of oil occasionally and voila, your Thaalipeeth is ready.

*Enjoy it with a spicy Pickle or with a bowl of curd, like I do.
My version of Thaalipeeth is a diet version. Gangubai added Oil rather generously while kneading the dough and then when cooking the Roti's.
Thaalipeeth is the healthiest and yummiest Roti and just right for the hot days of summer.
Have it for breakfast or have it for Lunch, or even as a snack, the choice is yours.*

If you want to learn Tolerance, or for that matter even test yours, you should either get married or become a regular on Social Media, Twitter to be more precise. Nothing will push your limits of Tolerance more than Marriage or Twitter will. Look at me, braver than The Great Khali, I did both!

With marriage come strangers into your life. Varied people, some nice, others nicer while still others who have decided to test your patience to its ultimate limits, and you can do little except be polite in return.

Along the way I have realized Twitter is pretty much the same. Different people, different expectations and a motley bunch who keep getting at you making you take your tolerance level higher and higher.

And I say a heartfelt Thank you to these people, both on Twitter and in those I met through Marriage, as it is because of them that I have learnt to be as calm and tolerant as I never imagined I would be.

U is for Ukdiche Modak

No state in India celebrates the annual Ganpati Festival with as much festive fervor as Maharashtra does! The days leading up to the actual 11 days of everyone's favorite God have all households bringing the Lord home busy.

Cleaning up the house, decorating it, choosing a special place for the remover of obstacles to be seated on AND making his favorite food, the Modak.

In Maharashtra Modak's come in many forms. The sweet ones made with Mawa, deep Fried one, or even Chocolate Modaks, traditional stuffed Modaks with different fillings and my most favorite, The Ukdiche Modak.

Ukdiche Modak is a steamed version of this sinful sweet that we get to eat once a year. Rice flour is cooked in hot water till it is done and then kneaded into a dough. This dough is used to make little balls which are rolled out into a small roti.

A mix of Jaggery and Coconut, with a hint of Cardamom, is prepared and cooled. This rich brown and ridiculously delicious mix is kept in the middle of the rice flour roti which is then delicately wrapped around it to form a pattern.

Experienced hands form a beautiful pattern while novices like me do their best, or use a ready mould.

This Ukdiche Modak is then steamed till it is done and eaten with warm melted ghee. It is also known as Kadubu in Kannada.

Being Understanding is more of a disadvantage than it is an advantage, is what I have been realising lately. People arrive late, and you understand that there could be traffic and not that they are just being tardy.

People are rude to you, and you understand that that is how they've been brought up, and not that they mind their manners when they are with someone who is perhaps not as understanding as you are.

Friends take you for granted, and you understand that everyone has busy lives, and not the fact that they are always around when they need you.

People filch your ideas, and you understand that maybe they were 'inspired' and dismiss the fact that they are lazy thieves.

Out of all this understanding the one thing I have finally understood is, believe people when they show you what they are and don't try to paint a different picture of them from the colours of your Understanding.

Understood? ;-D

V is for Vada Pav

I call Vada Pav and Traffic the two great equalizers in Bombay.

Whether you drive a BMW or Maserati or are driven around in one. Or you could be in a Nano or even riding a Scooty, we all halt and meet at the Traffic Signals, which are plenty. Similarly, you could be a Business Tycoon in a glass encased office or a Peon who attend to one, the Vada Pav manages to tickle all taste buds and brings a satiated smile to the face in the same way.

Enjoy your Vada Pav standing at your favorite street corner with a piping hot Vada crushed between the two slices of Pav and handed to you or have it cold as you carry one back home and unwrap it from the newspaper it came wrapped in, and the taste remains the same, fabulous!

In Bombay we all have our multiple favorite Vada Pav street carts dotted around the city. Enjoy this lethal combination of Carbs (from the Pav) and Starch (from the potatoes the Vada is made from) with fried green Chillies that enhance the taste or the powdered Garlic Chutney that gives the right kick! For those who are not too fond of spice that is very nice, the Khajur and Imli (Date and Tamarind) Meethi chutney is the perfect accompaniment.

I LOVE Ice cream. I can, and I have, eaten it for breakfast.

Vanilla is my most favorite flavor in an ice cream.

Why do I love Vanilla ice cream, you wonder? I love it because it is simple, and its versatility lies in its simplicity.

Add it to your Cold Coffee or Milkshake and you enhance the taste. Top it with Chocolate Sauce or your Favorite Fruit Compote and you have a dressed up Dessert.

Vanilla ice cream is a great accompaniment with cakes, brownies and I love it with Gajar Halwa as well. Add a scoop of it to a fizzy glass of Cola and you have a Coke Float!

A simple ice cream that adapts to so many different bases, see the versatility? Which is why I love Vanilla Ice Cream, as it is simple and versatile, just like me ;-D

W is for Broken Wheat Porridge

Do you have any idea how difficult it is to find food starting with 'W'? You do? Well, pat yourself on the back then, as I definitely did not!

When I began looking for food I like, from 'W', I drew a blank. Then as it always does, Google came to the rescue. But none of the foods it showed were my favorite. Wangi Bhaat, I am not too fond of. Wadi is the husband's favorite, not mine. And so on and so forth.

I reached out to my food blogger friend Tina for help and she shared her recipes starting with 'W' and asked me to go ahead and use whichever I like. I chose the Watermelon

Salad as it IS my absolute favorite and what with this crazy heat, a chilled bowl of this salad is most welcome!

So there I was, relieved that I had finally found a dish for 'W' and one that I loved, till I realized that all my favorite foods that I have shared so far have been Indian, and the Watermelon Salad was anything but.

Quandary!

What to do?

So, my Writers brain did some quick mental editing and I decided to go with the gorgeous Watermelon Salad AND add an Indian dish to 'W' to keep with the theme. I cheated a little as I decided to add one of my most favorite things to eat, one of my comfort foods, Broken-Wheat Porridge.

See, the base of this dish is Wheat, right? It just happens to be broken, for easier cooking. So there you go, I have an Indian Dish with 'W' too!

Being a Writer and Cook is so similar, is what I realized. There are times you need to improvise, and very cleverly at that. Like I just did. In not only choosing the dishes from 'W' but also in writing this post where I have merged my favorite foods and a little bit about me together without you realizing it. Wonderful, isn't it!

X is for Xmas Cake

As we near the A to Z it is getting harder and harder to find favorite foods with the last few alphabets. I thought long and hard about what food I like, from the alphabet 'X'. and came up with nothing!

So creative liberties shall be taken and my favorite Christmas Cake shall be presented as Xmas Cake! Ta, da!

There is a story I must share about Xmas Cake.

Now, my family loves Christmas Cake and all things baked, sweet and savory. So many years ago I had signed up for a lengthy Baking course. Just after I started my classes, and bringing the goodies I baked home with me I realized that my Parents, who are the strictest of vegetarians, would not even touch anything I baked with Egg in it. Which was almost everything.

So after I completed my never ending baking course, I promptly joined the same one once again, the Eggless avatar of it this time.

This Xmas cake was the first eggless cake I baked for my parents and they were thrilled! They thought it was the best tasting Xmas cake ever, and of course they were biased! I mean whoever heard of an Xmas cake not being drunk on Rum as delicious? You do realize that along with the Eggs I needed to omit adding the Rum to the cake as well, for the Parents.

The bestest part of a Xmas Cake are the candied peels and raisins which I soak in Rum for a good 45 days prior to using them in the cake. They get plump and drunk on the Rum and taste heavenly in the cake.

I tried telling my Parents that as I convinced them to eat my Egg and Rum based Xmas Cake, but they politely and adamantly refused to. Hence the Baking Course twice over.

Y is for Yogurt Chutney

Yogurt Chutney is the literal translation of Perugu Pachadi a dish common and loved in Telugu households. It is the perfect accompaniment to Biryani's, Rice, Khichdi's or even our Punjabi Stuffed Parathas.

Though it may look and seem like a Raita, this quick to rustle up side dish isn't one.

For one, the chopped Onion, Tomatoes, and a hint of grated Ginger are sautéed in Oil, to which finely chopped Green Chillies, Curry Leaves and dry Red Chillies have been added and sautéed.

Seasonings are Salt to taste, Red Chilly Powder and Turmeric.

This mixture is cooked till done and left to cool.

While it cools we whip up the Dahi till it is smooth, without adding any water to it, as we need a thick base. Add a bit of Salt to it, keeping in mind the quantity you've added to the Tomato and Onion mix.

When the mix cools add it to the Dahi and leave it as a garnish or mix it in the Dahi. And you're done!

Enjoy it chilled.

I find it hard to understand this '40 is the new 30' or '30 is the new 20' bit when it comes to birthdays and aging and I am always tempted to ask 'Going by that calculation, is 10 the new fetus, then?' * wide grin *

Every year you celebrate is a year worth cherishing. More so given what the world is facing these days. We wake up to news of Bomb Blasts, Massacres, and the like almost every day.

With children as young as toddlers losing their lives or their families we should consider ourselves fortunate that we could add another year to our lives, don't you think so?

Age is truly just a number and being Youthful is what you should feel and strive to be mentally. As when you do so it makes its way to your appearance as well. Grow older, but not in your thoughts. Grow up but don't become cynical. Have fun adapting to new changes. That is what being Young or Youthful should be all about.

Z is for Zunka

Zunka Bhakar is a popular food in Maharashtra.

It started off as being labelled as 'Poor Man's Food' or 'Farmer Food' and slowly gained prominence. If you Google Zunka you'll see top Chef's like Sanjeev Kapoor and Tarla

Dalal's recipes for it. It can also be found on the menu of some restaurants. Funnily enough Zunka is now considered a diet food as well as it is low on calories and rich in fiber.

Zunka is a spicy preparation of Gram Flour (Besan) made with Onion, Garlic and seasonings. The perfect accompaniment for Zunka is Bhakar – a flatbread made of Jowar Flour.

Zunka Bhakar is the food Farmers carry from home to the fields and is the only meal they have till dusk. Raw Onions, Techa (a super spicy Maharashtrian style red or green chilly and garlic paste) and Raw Green Chillies enhance the simple and flavors of Zunka and Bhakar, and spiced buttermilk washes down this delicious combination perfectly.

Life as we know is moving at a hectic pace. Before we realise it, months of a new year have gone by in a whoosh!

Where have the days, weeks, months and years gone, we often wonder.

Well, in the humdrum of existence, of getting up, working, sleeping and repeating this rigmarole day in and day out!

What we need to do to make life interesting is add some zing to everyday routines. Break the pattern and change habits regularly and surprise yourself.

Take a different route to work and see new sights. Watch or read an unexplored genre of film or book and learn something new. Splurge a little, if you're always saving and start saving, if you're always splurging. Wear a color you've always shied away from. Ah, the list is endless, once you start thinking!

After all, as the famous quote goes, 'You were not born to just pay bills and die.'