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Subodh Gupta serves up homely food as art

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Adavu, a play based on Therukoothu

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Gitanjali Rao on her debut in Shoojit Sircar's October

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When desi dishes go viral

India's kitchens are going through a silent shift in attitude, and the Internet is playing a pivotal part

ANUBHUTI KRISHNA

Bottle gourd, little gourd, pumpkin, radish – not exactly the kind of vegetables we love to eat, cook or Instagram. If at all we do, we relegate them to *sambars*, *poriyals*, *koftas* and curries, to consume them in disguise. But what happens when an entire community gets together to acknowledge, recognise, and celebrate these humble local vegetables?

On March 31, hundreds of people across the country got together to do just that – celebrate regional vegetables on *Sabzi Tarkari Din*, or Vegetable Day. More than two weeks later, the movement is gaining strength.

"Vegetables existed on this planet for thousands of years before man made his appearance," food critic and professor Pushpesh Pant remarked at the event in Delhi. "Even though they have sustained us since the Vedic times, we tend to underestimate vegetables. We follow the west blindly in their meaty diet, while modern science and research prove that if you sustain on vegetables, you are a healthier and happier person."

Credit where due

Pant doesn't seem to be the only person gung-ho about vegetables in Indian cuisine. Thousands of others, who joined in to celebrate the day in various innovative ways, seem to resonate with him. "Vegetables have always been an intrinsic part of Indian cuisine. From a simple onion smashed with salt to be eaten with a *paratha*, to crunchy *kachumbar* sa-



lads, tangy *raitas*, stir-fried greens, and elaborate gravies, vegetables find their place in every meal in India," Rushina M Ghildiyal, who is at the helm of the *Sabzi Tarkari Din*, says on a call from Mumbai.

Aided by a strong social media following (77,026 on Facebook; 23,046 on Twitter, and 3,040 on Instagram) the writer, consultant, culinary expert and founder of APB Cook Studio, *Sabzi Tarkari Din* began a move-



ment of sorts. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were flooded with updates, pictures, videos and recipes; the hashtag trended on Twitter and Instagram. Chefs and cooks joined hands to share regional and local recipes; home-makers and students showcased their favourite preparations; blog-

The calendar is aligned to activities traditionally done at that time of year

gers and writers walked through vegetable markets across the country to bring forth the variety and diversity of vegetables in India.

Rakesh Raghunathan of the Puliogare Travels blog showed viewers gooseberry, *milagaai*, sarsaparilla root, *vadumaanga*, and *sundakkai* from the busy lanes of Mylapore in Chennai; Kalyan Karmakar of Finely Chopped went to Pali market in Bandra, Mumbai and brought in stories of *tori*, *doodhi*, *tendli*, *bhopla*, yam and drumsticks.

Parvinder Singh Bali, Corporate Chef, Learning and Development at The Oberoi Center of Learning and Development, Delhi, ran a special class on preparations from across communities for his Kitchen Management Associates. Restaurants like Soda-BottleOpenerWala, Mumbai and The Eyr, Indore did pop-ups with out-of-the-box recipes like 'lauki shot glass dessert' and 'cucumber and mint mocktail'.

The bigger picture

Sabzi Tarkari Din is just one in a series. The idea of introducing Food Observance Days in India had struck Ghildiyal when she was preparing to celebrate Maca-

INDIAN FOOD OBSERVANCE DAYS

- Dal Divas – January 21, 2018
- Sabzi Tarkari Din – March 31, 2018
- Aam Achaar Day – April 22, 2018
- Papad Badi Day – May 13, 2018
- Masala Day – May 20, 2018
- Pulao Biryani Day – June 24, 2018
- Chai Pakoda Day – July 30, 2018
- Chutney Day – September 24, 2018
- Laddu Day – October 15, 2018
- Khichdi Day – November 2, 2018

Looking inwards The idea is to celebrate local produce and food practices • RAHUL ARORA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Indian dietetics, and dining etiquette have all been built into a system of traditional practices with a sound reason behind them," she asserts, adding, "IFOD is an attempt to promote and support traditional Indian ingredients, dishes, food-ways. It is also a way of collating recipes, sharing stories, and bonding with people."

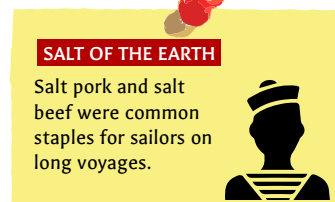
Indian Food Observance Days follow the Indian seasonal food calendar. The calendar is aligned to activities traditionally done at that time of year – pickles are made in April, spices are ground in May, *pakodas* are relished in the monsoons and *dals* are eaten in winter.

"If we stop and make that pickle or grind that spice like our predecessors did, we, in turn, will follow a cycle that has existed for centuries," Ghildiyal says. And where does she see this going? "I want to let it grow on its own," she says, "It is nice that the growth is organic. People are joining in to celebrate their food. That's all we want at the end of the day."



room Day and realised how India, despite its rich and diverse culinary tradition, has no such days.

"Indian traditional culinary practices evolved and transformed over time as our cuisine evolved. Ingredients, their uses, cooking methods, food combinations, a seasonal food calendar,



The mango with a beak

Looking back at a lifelong love affair with the *totapuri* or *kilimooku*, which revels in *chaats*, gravies and desserts alike

SREEDEVI LAKSHMI KUTTY

Come summer and drawing rooms are abuzz with mango talk: pedigree, quality, quantity and price. The arrival of various exotic varieties is awaited with bated breath. But in this land of connoisseurs, the most ordinary variety has been my favourite – the *kilimooku manga* aka *totapuri* or *kilichundan manga*.

This year, my Valentine's Day gift was the first bunch of *kilimooku* mangoes of the season from our farm. The first mango chutney of the season was prepared that night, and eaten with gusto. The fragrance of jee-

raga samba rice combined with the freshness of mangoes and sweetness of coconut milk was indescribable.

With its greenish-yellow colour, reddish spots on the outer skin and the light yellow inner flesh when raw; its crunchy sweet-and-sour taste when mature; and its yellowish-orange outer hue with creamy inner pulp when ripe... no other variety has the impact of this 'ordinary mango' with a beak.

It is my good fortune that the otherwise treeless plot of land we bought has a few *kilimooku*

mango trees. It's mostly relished by our neighbours and passersby, but we do get a few dozen every year, some years more than the others. The trees are not too tall: easy for me to climb and pluck the mangoes.

I first fell in love with these mangoes when we moved to Mumbai two decades ago. The hour-long daily commute made a quick evening snack at the local railway station necessary. The *totapuri*, sliced and arranged enticingly on the plate, with bright red chilli powder sprinkled atop, was irresistible. I would invariably ask for the *bhel puri* as well, with chopped mango giving it a distinct flavour.

Memories galore From tree-lined lanes to railway stations, this variety finds a presence everywhere

GP SAMPATH KUMAR, PV SIVAKUMAR AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Another unforgettable experience was my first *aam panma*, a cooling Maharashtrian drink made from raw mangoes. On that hot day, I drank the refreshing concoction made by women who had pulped the uncooked green *totapuri* with sugar, mint, and roasted and powdered cumin.

That was the day I decided this was my mango.

In season, *kilimooku* mangoes go into almost everything we make at home. Starting with the chutney made with coconut, pepper and curry leaves – what else can you expect from somebody born and brought up in Kerala? – right to the raw pieces on a plate.

The gravy we make with pumpkin or ash gourd and drumstick is made with half a mango, which gives it just the right amount of zing. The *sambar* and *aviyal* are cooked with mango pieces, and tamarind is relegated to the back shelf till the raw mangoes run out.

They go into *pachadi*, with mustard and grated coconut. They work beautifully in salads and, of course, are ideal for sweet-and-sour mango rice.

Despite being a lackadaisical cook, raw *kilimooku* gets me into a frenzy of making cut mango pickles. I make this in sesame oil with just red chilli powder, mustard, salt and curry leaves.

And this year, finally, the *kilimooku* mangoes inspired me to make my first batch of homemade *thokku* and *chunda*. Armed with simple, easy-to-follow recipes from my friend Radha, I made spicy mango *thokku* and sweet *chunda* – both organic, local and seasonal.

The sambar and aviyal get mango pieces, and tamarind is relegated to the back shelf as long as raw mangoes are in the market



RADHA'S RECIPE FOR CHUNDA (SWEET MANGO PICKLE)

INGREDIENTS

Raw mango cleaned, peeled, grated 2 cups
Jaggery or unrefined sugar 1 1/2 cups
Chilli powder: 1 tsp
Salt to taste
Jeera powder 1 tsp
Turmeric powder 1/2 tsp

METHOD

On a low flame, heat a thick-bottomed pan and add the grated mango, turmeric and raw cane sugar, stirring continuously. Cook till the raw cane sugar melts.

Add chilli powder, jeera powder, and salt and keep cooking till the raw cane sugar attains a single-string consistency. Once it does, remove from heat.

Bottle it once it has cooled down completely. Chunda can be preserved for a year and goes well with rotis, parathas, theplas and is just perfect for kids' lunches.

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