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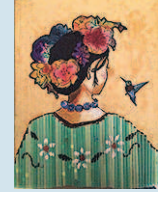
Tuesday, January 10, 2017



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Across boundaries

Artist Gayatri Aditya on her efforts to revive lost art forms

NAVEENA VIJAYAN



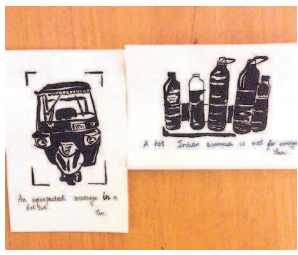
IN DIFFERENT WORLDS Gayatri Aditya and (below) impressions of India by her co-blogger Yan

Ever since artist Gayatri Aditya moved to Shanghai along with her husband five years ago, she has been exploring a culture so distant in a country so close. Recalling her first tryst with being an illiterate in the world's most populous country, she says, "I had to wander for hours before I could buy a loaf of bread. I did not know the Chinese word for bread, and my BlackBerry Messenger wouldn't work; it's defunct in China. So the only option I had was to get back home and look up the word on Google; thankfully, Google was accessible in China then (not any more)."

Years went by, and Gayatri kept gathering experiences, which now find a place on her blog, and a soon-to-be-out book that's part of the '51 Personae' project at the ongoing Shanghai Biennale. Curated by chief curator Raqs Media Collective and executed by curatorial collegiate Chen Yun and the '51 Personae Group' of the Dinghaiqiao Mutual Aid Society, the project explores the possibilities of everyday life. For the project, Gayatri has collaborated with Yan, who spends many months in India designing and sourcing hand-printed fabric, and sells them in China later. The blog includes both their experiences of living in another country: A Chinese living in India, and an Indian living in China.

"These experiences range from simple activities like crossing the road. Yan tells me that he finds it almost impossible to cross the roads in India, while for me, here, I don't even wait for the green signal. But in the last eight months, they have stepped up the presence of traffic police around the crossing area. Now, there are 12 cops just to manage just that, and cameras flashing everywhere," she says. But above all that, what really struck Gayatri as one of the important differences between the two countries was in the value that was given to each citizen's life. "In China, during summer, you can see each cop standing with an umbrella and a pedestal fan beside him!" she says, amused. In yet another incident, when her phone got pick-pocketed, the cops refused to record the complaint against someone from their country, until they were absolutely convinced.

Gayatri, who specialised in education programmes for several museums in China



printmaking from Kanoria Centre for Arts in Ahmedabad, and later did an arts management course from Dakshina Chitra, has designed education programmes for several museums in China. She teaches hand block textile print to adults at workshops in Shanghai. "Printmaking has its roots in China. But most do not know that. The Cultural Revolution (which took place between 1966 and 1976) forced several art forms out of the country, and limited the freedom of expression of people. Probably, printmaking vanished then, and it also explains why people here are so private," she says. "In the five years that we have been there, nobody has invited us for a wedding," she says with a laugh, and adds that it is mandatory for each guest at the wedding to pay for his or her plate to the host.

Yan's and Gayatri's project is an attempt to revive the lost art form. It will include Yan's work in textile and an art book illustrated by Gayatri using wood blocks. Participants can buy ready-made books or print the illustration of the book on their own using wooden blocks. "There will be a line or two written about our experiences in it, and will direct readers to the blog," she says. The blog link is <https://gayatriaditya.wordpress.com/> 2016/09/20/an-indian-in-shanghai/

SREEDEVI LAKSHMI KUTTY

When we began our rice-with-bran experiment 10 years back, I proudly presented the unpolished, small grained organically grown Komal rice from a friend's farm near Mumbai; our son looked at his plate and balefully asked, "Can we have some normal food in this house for Sunday lunch?" From that not so great beginning we have become a household that relishes Kuruva from Kerala, repeats Rajamudi from Karnataka, respects the deep red Mappilai Samba from Tamil Nadu and reveres the dark as the night Karuppu Kavuni. We find the universal, unnamed, polished white rice quite bland, having got accustomed to the distinct flavours of these rices.

The fully polished white rice that we get in the market is not the paddy rice our forefathers ate. They ate the flavourful, hand pounded rices grown locally during season. We have a rich cornucopia of rices ranging from white to red to black to scented rices. What we need to do is to welcome these back into our homes and diets. It is easier said than done, with all of us having become accustomed to fully polished white rice.

But on a misty, chilly December morning, with the dew drops on the grass soaking our city shoes when we walked to reach the rice diversity block in Panavelly, Wayanad at the Thanal Agroecology Centre I saw fully grown paddy plants, standing in hues of green, yellow, red, rust, brown and purple and heard the cornucopia of names, Thondi, Kala namak, Mullan kazhama, Jeeraga saala, Burma black, Kuruva and the stories accompanying them.

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This rice diversity block with 219 varieties is one of the many maintained by the Save Our Rice Campaign, working across six rice growing states to conserve and promote traditional rices. Every year sees more rice farmers from across the country joining the ranks of seed savers, conserving our rich heritage, to ensure protection of our diversity, food security and to create insurance against the vagaries of climate change. Interestingly most of these varieties do well under organic/natural conditions. Traditional paddy varieties are impressively climate resilient, Kattayanam is flood and drought resistant. Otadayan takes all of 180 days to mature but grows seven to eight feet tall providing plentiful fodder whereas arupatham kuruvai, as the name suggests, matures within 60 days providing short term income to the farmer.

What is good for biodiversity is also good for health and eating these traditional rices is a route to good health and promoting agro-biodiversity. Sundararaman Iyer, a well known organic farming guru says, "we all complain of micro nutrient and mineral deficiency while eating the same food year in and out, if we eat different rices across

Rice to the occasion

This Pongal, celebrate Nature's bounty by trying out some indigenous varieties of rice, writes SREEDEVI LAKSHMI KUTTY



the year we could get many of the micro nutrients we require.' However, there are many misconceptions about rice including that it causes obesity and is the cause of diabetes, and consequently there is an en masse exodus from rice to wheat or millets. Gandhasaale, my all time favourite

rice, grown in the Western Ghats, known for its fragrance, reminds me of my father every time we cook it. This was the only rice he relished and could digest in his last few years while in fragile health. My farmer friend tells me that when grown in the plains it loses its fragrance. Almost all varieties have distinct nutritional benefits; for example the famous navara rice is known for its medicinal properties and is used exten-

sively in Ayurveda. Pongal is upon us and it will be time to celebrate nature's bounty. This is the best time to welcome these traditional rices into our plates. These would lead to a colourful and varied pongal array - a ven pongal with Kichadi Samba, Thuyamalli or Rajamudi rice (a rice from Karnataka favoured by Wodeyar kings), a sakkarai pongal with one of the scented rices like Jeeraga Samba, gandhasaale or Mullan kazhama, a payasam with Karuppu kavuni. With the accompaniment of organic jaggery, cashew nuts, raisins, green gram dal and delicious pepper from the Western Ghats, make it a healthy and tasty Pongal.

lan kazhama, a payasam with Karuppu kavuni. With the accompaniment of organic jaggery, cashew nuts, raisins, green gram dal and delicious pepper from the Western Ghats, make it a healthy and tasty Pongal. Sreedevi Lakshmi Kutty is the Co-Founder of Bio Basics, a social venture retailing organic food, thereby creating a market for organic farmers; she is also a consultant for the Save Our Rice Campaign.

Sustainable and sweet!

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