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Beyond basmati

Over 300 fragrant rice varieties are being rescued from obscurity and extinction by committed farmers

Rice facts
 Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh have over 350 varieties of fragrant rices, while Odisha has 50 documented varieties. Almost all scented rices were accessible only to the royalty and not to the common man in earlier times. Gobinda Bogh is categorised as a *Khaas Dhan* or special grain and is the chosen offering for Lord Krishna. It is great for *payesh*, and used for Janmashtami offerings, pujas and festivals. Gandhasaale is much favoured in Tamil Nadu and used extensively for making pulavas and other dishes during special occasions.

Unconventional variety
 Mullan kashama is a rather unconventional scented or aromatic rice variety, neither long nor slender. Instead it is rather round with an amazing taste and aroma. Today it appears regularly at our lunch table. It is my spouse's favourite food in illness and good health. It is delicious in payasam and a friend who made Malabar biriyani with it can't stop raving. Its cultivation had dwindled to almost nothing but has now been revived by a handful of committed organic paddy farmers in Wayanad or any other scented rice variety except the ubiquitous Basmati.

Committed and passionate
 The revival of these scented rices is happening due to a small number of committed, passionate farmers and campaigns/groups working on seed and diversity conservation. They have scrounged and found lost seeds, worked to build markets where none existed, and educated the unaware about these delicious rices. Eating and cooking these rices is far better when grown organically. The aroma is also dependant on certain factors: cool temperatures during and after flowering stage and use of farmyard manure, manual de-

SPICY FACT
 Writings from the Neolithic Age suggests that Muziris in Kerala was a major spice trade centre from as early as 3000 BC

GANDHASALE
GOVINDA BHOG
MULLAN KASHAMA

The aroma wafts around the house and is almost like an appetiser. Scented rices tend to be relatively expensive, as they are generally low-yielding. It is not only humans who are addicted to aromatic rices. Birds love them too. A farmer from Wayanad explained how the gandhasaale fields have to be protected as the birds swoop down to pluck the tender fragrant grains from the stalk. The flip side is our ignorance about this treasure trove and our singular pursuit of Basmati to the exclusion of the scores of local varieties. This has led to a sad situation where farmers in South India or Eastern India try desperately and at great financial risk to grow Basmati to garner consumers and markets. As consumers, it is only our conscious choice of selecting these local scented rice varieties that will motivate farmers to grow these instead of pursuing varieties unsuitable to the climate and soil.

Packing in a punch

Hankering after hearty parathas?

• PANKAJA SRINIVASAN

If someone served me a plate of hot, crisp, stuffed parathas, I would kiss their hands. Sadly, no one is at the moment and, as I hate kneading dough, making the stuffing and so on, I satisfy my craving when I go out to eat. I did that when I went to That's Y Food where I was served a golden brown, piping hot gobhi paratha. It was the eve of my annual leave so I decided to not to make a fuss about the fact that they were made with ghee, and got down to business. "Try a mutter paratha," said Ranjana Singhal. I hate to say it in print but I followed that up with a achari paneer paratha and finally a jalapeno cheese-stuffed one. Then Singhal asked, "These are frozen parathas.



For that home-made taste •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

How did you like them?" As I gaped at her, she brought forth the parathas in their packages and told me she had launched a new product called Totaram's Good Parathas. I am not a great fan of frozen foods but I would never have guessed the hot, hearty parathas were anything but freshly made. "It took us many many months before we came up with the right taste," says Singhal and adds that the process of making them is strictly controlled by

QUICK FACTS

The vegetarian parathas are four to a pack and range from ₹90-135

The non-veg parathas are two to a pack and are priced at ₹120 for Chicken and ₹150 for Mutton

Available at Cafe Totaram, That's Y Food and On The Go, the Pazhamudir and Nilgiris outlets and Deli Fresh, Tiruppur

stringent quality control checks. After hits and misses, debates and tasting marathons, seven flavours were finalised. "These seven are our first phase. There will be more," promises Singhal. The vegetarian options are Aloo, Achari paneer, Jalapeno and cheese, Gobhi and Mutter. Non-vegetarians can pick up Chicken and Cheese and Mutton Keema.

The parathas have to be kept in the freezer and, for best results, brought to room temperature before putting them on the tava. If you are in a hurry, defrost them in the microwave first. "They are best made with ghee," instructs Singhal. But I try them out later with oil and they are fine that way too. (Of course, we all know that parathas are to be eaten with a big blob of white butter).

The packets have nutrition details and instructions. My only problem was to decipher the white on green print on the vegetarian package and I had to call up Singhal for help. She has promised to look into this.



Baker's dozen

Latha's Kitchen Studio will hold a week-long programme in baking beginning from getting started with the oven to preparing hand-made puffs, pizzas, breads, cookies, flavourful cakes, wholesome pies at home. Batch size is limited and registrations are on first-come-first-serve basis.

JULY 3 FROM 10.00 AM TO 3.00 PM
 @ 10/38 PMR Layout, Goldwins (Opposite KMCH hospitals), Avanashi Road
 ☎ 9865037137 to register

Italian delights

Le Meridien launches a new menu at Favola, its Italian speciality restaurant, featuring dishes like Cotti di agnello alla nuova zelandata alla griglia, pollo alla griglia cons salsa savalia and more.

ONGOING, ONLY FOR DINNER FROM 7.00 PM ONWARDS

@ Favola, Le Meridien, Avanashi Road
 ☎ 0422-2364363 for reservations

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