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## Black and beautiful

Rummage through your grandmother's storeroom and see if you can unearth her old kalchattis



**Slow and steady** Each size and shape is meant for a specific dish \*SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

By SREEDEVI LAKSHMIKUTTY

Omana amma would walk in mid morning with a day's worth of betel leaf and a beautiful smile. She would settle down to leisurely exchange of the day's news with my mother. Half an hour later, she would chop vegetables and build a small fire in the two wood stoves in the kitchen annexe. In the next hour, delicious aromas would waft from the kalchattis (stone vessels) and manchattis (mud vessels) bubbling over small well-managed fires. All of us relished her delicious sambars, aviyal, theeyals and kaalan. When she stopped cooking for us, the kalchattis were relegated to the loft.

As my interest in traditional food increased, Omana amma's cooking came to mind. A few years ago, I started rooting around my parents' loft and found a few kalchattis that my mother had inherited from her grandmother. These were bequeathed to me and so I have a few old black kalchattis of varying sizes and shapes. Some are tall with a small circumference and used for making puli inji or rasam. Another is suitable for

### KALCHATTI CARE

Traditionally kalchattis need to be seasoned before use

Apply organic coconut oil inside and outside using coconut fibre. Leave it on for a day and wash off with non-toxic natural dishwash powder

Use over low flame initially. As the kalchatti ages, it can be used on medium flame

Never heat when empty and do not expose to abrupt temperature changes

Do not drop them. I wrap a kitchen towel around it and place it on a tray that is taken to the table

sambar, a third for aviyal and so on. The surfaces have a matt black patina – the black from the wood stove and years of use and the smooth finish from decades of soft scrubbing.

Kalchattis are cooking vessels carved out of soapstone, a naturally occurring soft stone. Thick walled and heavy, they ensure slow and even cooking. Since they are porous, heat and moisture circulate through the pot while cooking, thereby enhancing the flavours.

Traditionally used on wood stoves, these can also be used on the modern gas stove. Kalchattis neutralise the pH balance of acidic food items and thus enhance their nutritional value. Kalchattis can be used to prepare gravies, but not for dry preparations or sautéing.

Let the food cook slowly. Turn off the flame 4-5 minutes before the food is fully cooked. It will continue to cook slowly in the heat retained inside the



vessel. The time taken to heat the kalchatti is compensated when the slow cooking process continues even after the stove is switched off.

**Thick walled and heavy, they ensure slow and even cooking. Since they are porous, heat and moisture circulate through the pot while cooking, thereby enhancing the flavours**

Food cooked in old kalchattis keep well for the next day as well without refrigeration. As the vessel ages, the cooking quality improves. Most important, the kalchatti has to be seasoned before you start cooking in it.

Even after seasoning, the kalchatti should be introduced gently and slowly into daily cooking. Use on a low flame and don't let the water dry while cook-

### HOW TO SEASON IT

Soak the kalchatti in water in which rice was washed. The starch helps clean the grit and close the pores

Put the vessel on the stove with either water in which rice has been washed or the starchy liquid obtained by draining boiled rice

Bring to boil on a very low flame. Allow it to cool

Wash the vessel with a non-chemical dishwash powder and apply organic cooking oil and turmeric powder. Leave overnight

Wash it off and repeat the process two to three times

ing. Periodically oil it and leave overnight before washing it in the morning.

My kalchattis have become an integral part of the cooking routine. Sourcing organic, whole foods from farmers and preparing it in my grandmother's kalchattis changes the tenor of the whole act of sourcing and cooking food.

Food is less of a commodity and more of a bond with the farmers; cooking has become less a chore and more an active connection to my grandmother. Search through your grandmother's store of vessels to find kalchattis or order them online. They are usually available in temple fairs.

Sreedevi Lakshmi Kutty is the Co-Founder of Bio Basics, a social venture retailing organic food, and a Consultant to the Save Our Rice Campaign. She can be reached at 9790516500

## Eat well, eat wisely

It is all about eating traditional and therefore eating healthy, says S. Arunkumar, of the newly opened outlet of Paruthipaalum Paniyaaramum. Millets and indigenous rice varieties rule the roost with Mappillai samba, Kaikuthal, or Kavuni rice and millets such as kuthiraivaali, cholam, and saamai. Kolkukkattis and paniyaarams are made of these as are the rotis and pooris.

Arunkumar feels there is a growing awareness about eating healthy. "Many are making an effort to move to a millet-based diet as it helps regularise body metabolism and helps control blood sugar," he says. Paruthipaalum Paniyaaramum has made it easier for those who want to eat healthy food in the comfort of their homes. The restaurant delivers wholesome meals in tiffin carriers. The combination of

multi grains and traditional recipes ensures a feeling of well being, says Arunkumar and adds that they also serve up a wholesome vegetable salad, a new one every day.



### QUICK FACTS

Paruthipaalum Paniyaaramum is at 32, Sir Shanmugam Road, R.S. Puram  
 Open from 9.00 am to 9.00 pm and from 4.00 pm to 9.00 pm on Sunday  
 Call 9500969392/ 9500969390 for details

## Biryani on song

The ubiquitous biryani now has an anthem all its own



By PRABALIKA M BORAH

Praveen Kumar.

The 'biryani anthem' – a parody of Ed Sheeran's *Shape of You* – is now the talk of the town. The video, which has crossed the two million mark within 24 hours of going online. It is made by Bengaluru-based stand-up comedian, Ahmed Shariff along with Sanjay Manaktala and

Biryani lovers are tagging each other on social media to the video and letting their love for the dish all hang out. Ahmed says he has picked two popular things and mixed them up, and in this case it is biryani and the song *Shape of you*, by Ed Sheeran. "I just mixed the two to express the biryani love," he says.

**ALTERNATIVE TO FAST FOOD**

In 1986, Carlo Petrini founded Slow Food, a grassroots organization that strives to preserve traditional and regional cuisine and encourages farming of plants, seeds, and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem

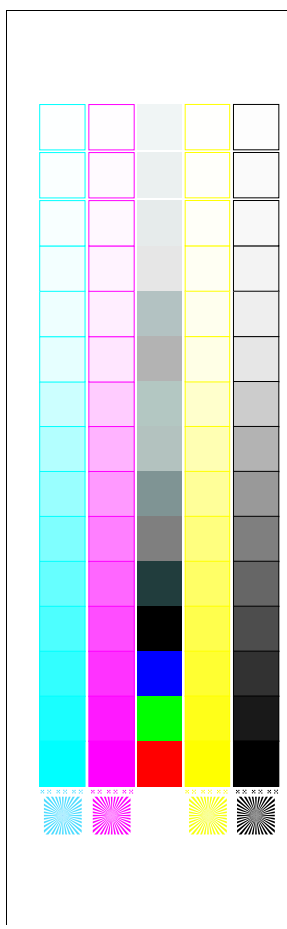
**Slow food**



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**Art show**  
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