

1 Ten kilos of maida are kneaded with water, salt and baking soda to make a homogeneously smooth dough.



SNACK PEEK

At the 65-year-old Arumugam Mess in Madurai, we watch skilled *parotta* masters cook the iconic *kothu parotta* with artsy expertise. Here's a step-wise explanation of their method

# In a swirl of dough

● A SHRIKUMAR ■ PHOTOS: G MOORTHY

2 Handfuls of the dough are pinched and rolled into balls of equal size.



5 Chopped onions, tomatoes and curry leaves are tossed on to the *tawa*, to which a pinch each of salt, pepper, chilli and turmeric powders is added. Further, two raw eggs and some oil are poured on the mixture.

6 Shredded *parottas* are added finally and the whole mixture is given a good round of beating with two metal plates, giving out a rhythmic tingling sound and a flavoursome aroma.



3 The balls are flattened by hand, sprinkled with oil and fanned repeatedly to a thin membrane-like consistency, which is either folded into squares known as *madakku parotta* or rolled out into discs.



4 The flattened bread-like *parottas* are tossed on a hot *tawa* with oil until they turn golden-brown.



7 Crispy oil-fried curry leaves are strewn on top and the tasty *kothu parotta* is served with *salna*.

# The great Indian bake-off

A young blogger, who inspires a whole generation of teens and young adults to bake, is out with his new book

● SUNALINI MATHEW

"It all started with a lot of bad cakes," says 22-year-old Shivesh Bhatia, who began baking at the age of 16 and soon turned it into a living. He isn't a chef, though he did think of attending pastry school once. But he soon dropped the idea because, "I can't imagine standing in a kitchen in isolation for 12 hours."

Shivesh is now out with his first book on baking. With a foreword by friend and fellow sweet-treat lover, Pooja Dhingra, the simply-titled *Bake With Shivesh* (HarperCollins) book has 54 recipes with tips and tricks (ranging from why the top of a cake cracks or burns, to why the cake is dense and not fluffy). "These are things I wish I had known when I started," he says.

After developing over 100 recipes, styling them and photographing them, only the best were picked: those that looked and tasted great. "There was this fancy dessert I'd done with Choux pastry. I'd filled it with pastry cream and topped it with berries, but I just couldn't shoot it right. Sometimes it's just a bad day," he says, never "cheating" by putting in anything that is not food, that you cannot simply pick off the styling table and eat.

If you don't already know him, Shivesh is a blogger ([bakewithshivesh.com](http://bakewithshivesh.com), and [@shivesh17](https://www.instagram.com/shivesh17) on Instagram with 1,23,000 followers), that catch-all phrase for people who put out content online. And an influencer, the logical corollary for those who accumulate followers and can then work with brands for a fee, to integrate content, create standalone products (like a recipe booklet), or do styling or shooting campaigns.

Shivesh started working with food companies such as Britannia, Foodhall, Epigamia, Kellogg's, Mother Dairy, and many more, but more recently opened up to lifestyle brands such as Canon, Starbucks, and Whirlpool (for their micro-



It starts at home Shivesh's first attempt at baking was inspired by his grandmother's chocolate cake • SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

waves). In fact, he's even done a workshop with Kiehl's, using the natural ingredients in their products – oranges, cranberries, honey – in a styling and baking workshop.

Ironically, his baking journey also started with a brand he did an association with: Betty Crocker. It was a day in Gurugram, when his *naani* (grandmother) was

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ill, and his three cousins and he were gathered around her. Inspired by her chocolate cake, they decided to give it a shot, with a Betty Crocker mix. "We stood in front of the oven all the while, and still managed to burn it," he says laughing. But because he enjoyed the process so much, he worked at it. "I was whipping up one disaster after another; everything was inedible!" he says. "But I couldn't give up on it."

His aim, whether through his blog or book, is to "make baking simple and more accessible". The idea is to get people so tempted with the way he styles and shoots his creations, that they "pick up a whisk and get baking".



Revival tale Farmer Ramji Yelappa cultivates the crop; (below) millet *bhakis* on a platter • JAGADISH MANDYA AND SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

# The brown and the beautiful

Karnataka's brown top millet is sustainable, tasty and healthy, and it is about time we bring it back to our plates

● SREEDEVI LAKSHMIKUTTY

I came upon farmer Raghu and his team in an open tent at a festival, where they had set up a mini kitchen with stoves, *chappati* dough, plates and all. They had mounds of coconut, peanuts, onion, green chillies and coriander, all ready for their chutney. More interestingly, the women were deftly shaping the dough by hand into large, round, traditional *bhakis* on a wooden board.

It all looked so simple and easy. As soon as the *bhakri* was made, it was smoothly transferred to a *tawa*

and came out looking perfect. We all relished it with the spicy chutney, the recipe of which Raghu shared. We learnt that the *bhakri rotis* were made with the elusive brown top millet, called *koralu* in Kannada.

I came back home, determined to prepare the *bhakis*, and bit dust.

Today, from a small beginning, about 80 farmers are growing *koralu* on 200-plus acres of land in the State

The dough stuck stubbornly to the rolling board and my fingers, and had to be peeled off and flung, thick and shapeless, on the pan. It bore no resemblance to the ones made at Raghu's kitchen. But the saving grace was the taste; even I couldn't ruin the taste of the *bhakis*. It was delicious and, of all the millet *bhakis* I have ever eaten, were by far the best, and kept well even up to a month.

So what made this millet go out of favour, so much so that it almost disappeared from the farms? Seed activist Krishna Prasad, who is trying to revive this millet, grew up in the district of Tumkur in Karnataka (where farmers have to scrape a living from rocky soil and almost no water). He remembers it being cultivated there. "Most families grew *koralu* for their own use, but I don't remember seeing it in the markets. At some point, people stopped growing it and, with a few successive droughts, the seeds also began to disappear. Somehow, the memory of the millet stayed with me, and in around 2009-10, we encouraged Raghu, who is also from Tumkur, to revive this millet."

Raghu motivated the women in his village to cultivate the millet, processed it in *ragi*-processing machines and marketed it. The marketing was simple: wherever there was an event, they would prepare the *rotis/bhakis* and feed the public. That brought in the buyers. Today, from that small beginning, about 80 farmers are growing *koralu* on 200-plus acres of land in the State.

Inspired, I tried to make the *bhakri* again, with not-so-spectacular results. So I cheated a little. I added a little emmer wheat flour to the brown top millet flour, and the *bhakis* behaved! I also cooked the millet like rice; it is soft, and mixes well with gravies.

With the ever-changing pattern of rains, we will soon have to adapt to grains that grow without a fuss. We will also have to create intermediate technology to process these grains economically, and learn to prepare tasty food with it. Brown top millet could easily replace cous-cous. Why not add the cooked millet to a salad, or a soup, and make it a single-pot meal?

