In a swirl of dough

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

—Shashikanth Mathew

“It all started with a lot of bad cakes,” says 22-year-old Shashikanth Mathew, who began baking at the age of 16 and now runs it as a business. He isn’t a chef, though he is skilled at preparing bakery items at school. But he soon dropped the idea because, “I can’t imagine standing in a kitchen in isolation for 12 hours.” Shashikanth is now out with his first book on baking. With a foreword by the chef and fellow foodie lover, Pragya Ojha, the newly-titled Bake With Shashikanth (HarpurCollins) book has 50 recipes with tips and tricks (ranging from why the top of a cake crumbles or how, in India, the cake is dense and not fluffy) “There are things I wish I had learned when I started,” he says.

After developing over 100 recipes, styling them and photographing them, the best ones were picked those that looked and tasted great.”

If you don’t already know him, Shashikanth is a blogger (bakewithshashikanth.com) and Instagrammer with 32,000 followers, that talks all about for people who put up content online. And an influence the logical culinary for those who accumulate followers and can then work with brands for a fee, to integrate content, create standalone products (like a recipe book), or do styling or shooting campaigns.

Shashikanth started working with food companies such as Britannia, Proactiva, Epigamia, Kellogg’s, Mother Dairy, and many more. But most recently, he opened up to lifestyle brands such as Cartton, Storbooks, and Whiteloo the three micro-stores.

In fact, he’s even done a workshop with Bakeslife, using the natural ingredients in their products - oranges, cranberries, honey - in a styling and baking workshop.

In a swirl of dough

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

1. The dough is kneaded with water, salt and baking soda to make a fine-textured, smooth dough.

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

3. The balls are flattened by hand, sprinkled with salt and flour, repeatedly to a thin, Munich-like consistency, which is then folded into squares known as chapalaka parotta or redi cut into discs.

4. The flattened broad-line parotta is then tossed on a hot tawa with oil until they turn golden-brown.

5. Crisp oil-fried paratha leaves are showered on top of the tawa before hot oil is transferred to the leaves.

6. Uncoiled parotta are added finally and the whole mix is garnished with garam masala, a pool of sauce with two malai paste, giving it a picturesque and flavorful aura.

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

Sandwich like Farming

Vaigai cultivation is the crop; glinted, and Shashikanth is a master-planter – “Amidst nature’s gift of land and love, we learned to cultivate.”

The dough stack stubbornly to the rolling board and my fingers, and had to be peeled off and thing, thick and shapeless, on the pan. It bore no resemblance to the ones made at Raghu’s kitchen. But the saving grace was the same; even if I couldn’t ruin the name of the others. It was delicious and, of all the myriad Kothu- rai I have ever eaten, was by far the best, and kept well even up to a month.

Sandesh made this millie go out of favor, as much so that it almost disappears in the foodie world. But what has changed is that now, instead of the market, there’s a community around it. Most families grow jowars for their own use, but I often wonder if, at some point, people stopped growing and, with a few successive droughts, the need also began to disappear. Somehow, the memory of the millie stayed with me, and in around 2000, I encouraged Raghu, who is also from Tamil Nadu, to bring it to market.

Raghu motivated the woman in his village to cultivate this millet, processed it in a captive processing mill. The market was simple wherever there was an unmet need, they would prepare the jowar millie and lend the public.

The concept grew. Today, from that small beginning, about 80 farmers are growing kordal on 200-plus acres of land in the State. Inspired, I tried to make the Jowar again, with no preconceptual outcomes. We cultivated a small field of jowar, but didn’t get very good results. It was difficult to find a buyer for the jowar millie. But this has changed. We even sold it to hotels and to local villages, in a sort of well garnished.

With the ever-changing pattern of fate, we will soon have to adapt to the grains that grow without a diet. We will also have to create intermediate technology to process these grains economically, and learn to prepare tasty food with a brown top millier could easily replace common. We can add spice and let it be a soup, or a spread, and make it a simple meal pack.”

The brown and the beautiful

Karnataka’s brown top millier is sustainable, tasty and healthy, and it is about time we bring it back to our plates.

—Siddhesh Lahkarwad

I came upon Raghu and his team in an open tent at a festival, where they had set up a small kitchen with steers, chunky dough,脉络 and all. They had lectures on coconut, peanuts, onions, green-chili and pomegranate, all ready for their delight. More interestingly, the women used daily clapping for dough by hands large, round, traditional jowar on a wooden board. It all looked so simple and tasty. As soon as the dough was made, it was smoothly transferred to a new and came out looking perfect. We all relished it with the spicy curry, the recipe of which Raghu shared. We learnt that the jowar millie was made with the single brown top millier, called jowar in Karnataka.

I came back here, determined to prepare the jowar, and it did.

“Taking it back to the basics, the jowar brown top miller is a simple ingredient that is healthy and delicious, and fits in with our current lifestyle.”

What is Jowar?

Jowar or sorghum is a cereal crop that is rich in iron, calcium, and other vitamins. It is grown in various parts of the world, including India, and is considered a nutritious and healthy food source.