

## Food: an unspoken love language

All of us recall certain cherished memories when we go reminiscing down memory lane. My childhood was filled with staples like cartoons and grandma's stories but more importantly, as I recall one of my favourite memories, of the days when I would lay in Ammuma's\* lap watching T.V while she would chop vegetables or devein the Colocasia leaves for Pathrodo\*, I can almost still feel the charm of the innocent days along with the love and warmth. That warmth and love is still felt in Ammuma's meals, cooked by her with unmeasurable love and passion.

Growing up with my grandparents forms a major chunk of my childhood; going with Aabu\* to the farm to help and carrying the coconut-filled sacks even though they broke my back and helping Ammuma dry Happols in the sun, playing with the utensils in the kitchen pretending to cook meals just like my Ammuma. Apart from this, I watched a lot of food and lifestyle shows with great passion and curiosity. From Masterchef Australia, to Food Safari to the classic Sanjeev Kapoor's Khana Khazana, these shows helped grow my interest in cooking and love for food. Experimenting comes easily to me and I truly feel myself when I cook. Ten-year old Soumya was so proud of her knowledge of kitchen appliances and techniques. I still remember curiously going through an age-old cookbook we had at home and trying to cook with whatever un-sophisticated ingredients we had at home.

Food means a lot to me: be it cooking it or trying out new recipes. Growing up in this world of perfectly sculpted bodies and clear skin, my relationship with food has been a little complicated but I never let anyone make me feel bad for having that extra spoon of biriyani or another Appalam.

Food as love language is so beautiful. When people treat food as expression; as a medium to express their love for someone, the love that goes in makes the meal delicious, something no high-quality ingredient or Michelin Star can match. The warmth and affection in the homecooked meals is truly unparalleled bringing people together. The unparalleled warmth and affection of a homecooked meal never fails to bring people together. Hostel food always drains the life out of me but the thought of vacation nearing and all of us sharing recipes, stories, drooling and longing for our favourite homecooked meals is the perfect antidote. The curious food nerd in me finds great joy in guessing ingredients of every dish I eat and savouring the meal without failing to appreciate the process and its contents.

Eli Brown in her "Cinnamon and Gunpowder" says, *"Some foods are so comforting, so nourishing of body and soul, that to eat them is to be home again after a long journey... to eat such a meal is to remember that, though the world is full of knives and storms, the body is built for kindness."* This always stayed with me because, I believe that food as a love language can heal us. Be it a cup of coffee after a long day or warm plate of rice and your favourite curry when you feel low, food served with love is that warm hug you always longed for but never knew you needed. When I go back home for vacation, Ammuma still makes the carrot and potato poriyal that I loved as a kid. I do not always crave it but seeing her eagerly make it for me, I forget all my troubles. Almost every day as a kid, I would sit with her in the kitchen, taking in all the aromas of the mouth-watering curries simmering away in the household. Every mouthful of that meal takes me back to my days in Aleppey with my grandparents where Ammuma would sing songs and narrate stories as I gobbled down the food.

My mom's Semiya Upma and dad's fish curry make me want to run back home from Chennai every single day. The efforts that go into the meal; both physical and mental, take it up a notch. When someone cooks for me, especially something that is my favourite, life becomes worth living. The joy in consciously remembering a person's favourite meal and cooking it for them and watching them eat it with joy till their heart's content is a feeling unmatched.

Food brings us all together like nothing else. Sharing recipes and recreating them has kept generations of communities and their culture alive. Their stories live on through these recipes as people keep recreating them and continue to celebrate the beauty and depth of the rich tapestry of their culture. There are innumerable debates regarding origins of a particular dish and which is superior but, what matters is how willing we are to accept a similar dish without feeling threatened and to also value the richness of the tradition across communities. We share the earth with millions of people, there could be no greater joy than that of sharing our culture and our stories with them. So, here is to manifesting warmth and happiness all around the world be it over a cup of coffee or a different version of samosa.

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\***Ammuma**: Konkani term for Grandmother

\* **Pathrodo**: Rolled and steamed Colocosia leaves marinated in a spicy, tangy batter of Urad dal, rice and lots of coconut and tamarind, a popular delicacy in the Konkani Coast among the Marathi (Alu Vadi), Gujarati (Pathra) and Konkani communities.

\* **Aabu**: Konkani term for Grandfather

\***Happol**: Konkani term for Pappad