

Cooking made simple

BOOK Viji Varadarajan's cookbooks are a record of traditional South Indian recipes

For many young people, pasta is easier to make than rasam these days. After all, it just involves getting online, printing out a recipe and buying a pasta sauce. However, eventually everyone craves their mother's or grandmother's rasam. Which could explain why Viji Varadarajan's books are doing so well.

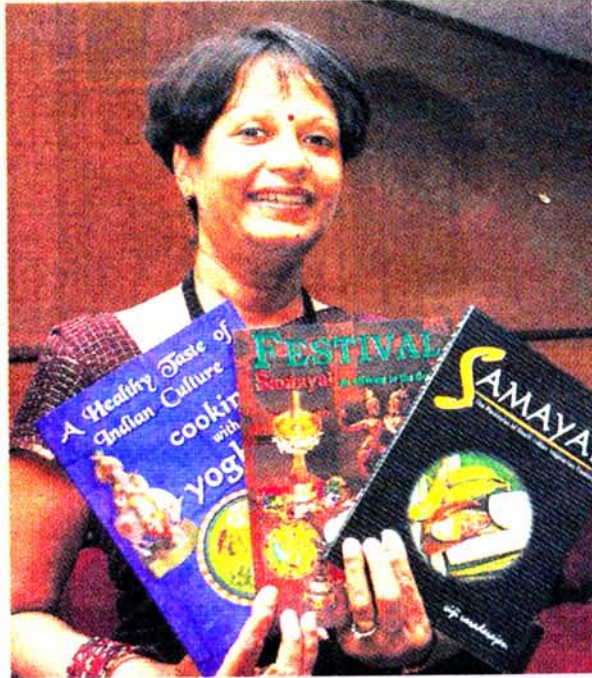
At a release function of her three most popular books, she explained why she had chosen to redo and re-publish *Samaya! The Pleasures of South Indian Vegetarian Cooking* and *Festival Samaya! An Offering to the Gods*.

"I've made everything simpler. Shortened recipes and measured cooking times. I'm also releasing it in paperback at a lower price so it can reach more people," she said. Her recently released third book, *Cooking With Yoghurt: A Healthy Taste of Indian Culture*, written in keeping with the philosophy of the first two, was also discussed at the function.

The reason Viji's books are so interesting is because they act as a record of the recipes of a Tamil Brahmin food, resurrecting old favourites as well as keeping traditional everyday cooking alive. At a time when a sort of pan Indian cooking is invading every kitchen — rice, dal, paneer, garam masala — books of this sort are important to preserve the identity of a culture. For identity is inextricably tied up with food habits.

Plenty of choice

The reason they're doing so well is because she's made the recipes simple, and more important, quick. *Samaya!*, for



RESURRECTING OLD RECIPES Viji Varadarajan

PHOTO: R. RAGU

instance, her best-selling book so far, lists 12 kinds of rice, including vaangi bath (brinjal rice) and maangai sadham (raw mango rice). Besides a variety of gravies, vegetables, curries and pachadies, she even gives eight recipes for rasam, and a list of 'tiffin' items.

Nandita Krishna of the C.P. Art Foundation, who spoke at the event, stated that she gave her son a copy of *Samaya!* when he moved away from home, before commending Viji for going "on a journey to collect recipes which are no longer fashionable." Talking about how it's now "easier during Deepavali to go to Grand Sweets, see the shiniest looking ones and just order," she said people should remember that "our festival cooking was more than just a collection of recipes. There is a science to it. In summer, we make food that cools the body. Food that prevents measles, mumps

and chicken pox." She then urged the author to start working on books for different communities. "Each region has its own cooking," she said. "I'm from South Arcot. It's dry land, with dry crops. We use peanut and pumpkin in our cooking. Our recipes are totally different."

M. S. Swaminathan, chairman, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, spoke about the importance of a culinary heritage.

"These books are not only for those interested in cooking," he said, "There is a deeper message. We have a heritage we must remember." He complimented the author for the combination of science and spirituality that went into the book. "The integration of spirituality with food is striking," he said.

AVM Saravanan was also present at the function.

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