

C U I S I N E

Just like grandma made it

Traditional fare from Southern kitchens.

R. KRITHIKA

GIVEN the number of ready-to-eat foods and various mixes that are readily available, people are only too ready to write off traditional cooking methods. But there are some who do not seem to give up hope. One such is Viji Vardarajan, who has published her second book **Vegetarian Samayal of South India**. A comprehensive contents list includes rice dishes, gravies, vegetables, snacks and sweets.

Memories of earlier times

Just going through the contents brings back memories of grandmothers' kitchens. While many are familiar with a basic *sambar-rasam*-vegetable routine, *vazhaipoo puli kootu* (banana flower in tamarind gravy) or *kathirikkai rasavangi* (eggplant and lentil gravy) have become rarities.

While the rice dishes — lemon rice, coconut rice, tamarind rice etc — are fairly common and easily made, it is in the *sambars* and *kootus* that Varadarajan's book scores.

There are about 40 dishes in these two sections — all delicious and definitely worth the trouble of making. Apart from the two dishes mentioned above, the *mor keerai* (spinach in yoghurt) and *Kadhamba* curry (mixed vegetable dish) are excellent.

Thuvayals, a kind of chutney, is also given its due. Normally one gets the various avatars of coconut chutney, but here you get recipes for

peerkangai thuvayal (ridge gourd), *kathirikkai thuvayal* (eggplant) and *kothammali thuvayal* (coriander) among others.

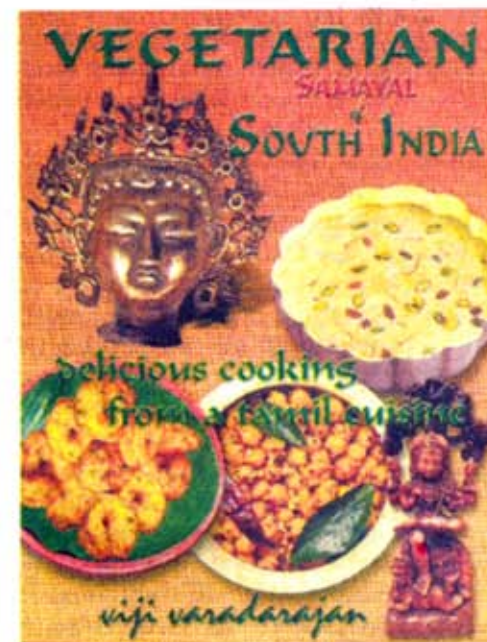
Labelling *rasams* as soups strikes a discordant note. While *rasams* do make good substitutes for soups especially in cold weather, they are much more. Vardarajan's *poondu rasam* and *annasi rasam* are indeed lip-smacking good.

The snacks comprise the hoary favourites *idli*, *doasi*, *vadai* but there are also little gems to be found here — *vendhiya dosai* and *peserat* for instance. The *appam* and *ishtu* deserves a mention though it takes a while to master the art of making the *appam*. The instructions make it seem very simple. There are a variety of *upmas* and *kozhakattais*. Some of the *kozhakattais* and *sundals* are repeats from Varadarajan's earlier book on dishes for various festivals.

Useful tips

The cooking instructions are clear and simple. Follow them step-by-step and you could recreate grandma's specialities. The initial tips could be of great use to a greenhorn in the kitchen as are the recipes for *sambar podi*, which is pretty much in constant use.

Apart from a glossary, which gives the Tamil names and uses of the various ingredients mentioned in the pages, Vardarajan also provides a list of menus. There are six plans for



Vegetarian Samayal of South India; Viji Vardarajan, Orient Enterprises, Rs. 270.

lunch and seven for “evening tiffin”, which could take the place of dinner. The “Quick reference guide” is another very useful page. If you don't have ash gourd at home and still want to go ahead with *mor kuzhambu*, don't worry just consult the relevant page and you'll find quite a few handy tips.

V.K. Rajamani's photographs are sumptuous and mouth watering. And also a helpful hint as to how the finished product should look. But that may take a while.