Crunchy Spicy Jaffna Bites

Posted on



Clockwise from right: Paruthi Thurai vadai, Mixture, Pakoda and Murukku

Swirls of murukku and flat vadai turned a golden brown in the hot oil. The spicy aroma was enticing as we watched the crunchy flavoursome bites of the North take on a mouth-watering form.

Words Swetha Rathnajothi
Photograph Menaka Aravinda and Geeth Viduranga

A journey to Jaffna would be incomplete if you do not taste the savoury delights of the North. These are prepared in a special manner to ensure that the wholesome goodness and fiery flavour are maintained to give a crunchy bite. Great skill and planning are required. As such home-made murrukus, flat vadais and mixture are the best. K Pararajasekaran and his wife P Sri Jeevaranjini, who live in Chundikuli, started their business of Jaffna snacks as a hobby in their home in 2002.

Pararajasekaran says the making of the many varieties of crunchy bites are all his wife’s work.

Behind their home in the workshop, Jeevaranjini and her assistant were busily preparing the ingredients. Onions and garlic were peeled, red chillies were chopped. The various flour mixtures were prepared according to required quantities. We were in time for the making of the Paruthi Thurai Vadai. Jeevaranjini while grinding the garlic in the van gediya, explained that these snacks could be prepared within an hour, except for the fact, that large quantities required more time.

Point Pedro Vadai/Paruthi Thurai Vadai



Paruthi Thurai vadai is deep fried till golden brown

To make the Paruthi Thurai vadai, wheat flour, ulundu, dry chilli, curry leaves, turmeric powder, red onions, salt, fennel seeds and ground garlic were soaked in warm water. “The secret behind the taste of these yummy snacks is the garlic, which is ground and soaked in warm water. This gives a special aroma and taste,” said Jeevaranjini.

> “The thinner the slices, the crispier and taster the vadai.”

Using a rolling pin, the dough is flattened and spread. Using a circular mold, the shapes are cut. Her tip is to sprinkle some unsteamed wheat flour while rolling the dough, to avoid stickiness. “The thinner the slices, the crispier and tastier the vadai,” she insisted. Her assistant, Nirojinika quickly sets up the hearth and places a large frying pan with oil. Wood and coconut husks are added so the oil is heated fast. In the mean time, Jeevaranjini makes arrangements to prepare pakoda. She said, “It’s easy when the preparations are made as then it is a matter of frying and adding the final touches.” We were impressed as the seemingly simple tasks required great skill and energy to handle within minutes. Once the oil was ready, slices of thata (flat) vadai were deep fried, till these turned golden brown. Piping hot Paruthu Thurai vadai was ready to munch on! Next was the making of pakoda.

Pakoda

Pakoda is left for a moment after frying to remove excess oil

Bengal gram (soaked for three hours and grounded), steamed and roasted wheat flour, dry chili, salt, fennel seeds and curry leaves, turmeric powder and garlic water were added together and kneaded into a dough. Interestingly a customised machine was used to prepare these snacks, where the dough was pressed through the mold with the right amount of pressure and was dropped into the hot oil. Pakodas were deep fried until golden brown. Nirojinika firmly pressed the dough in one go. At the same time Jeevaranjini prepared the ingredients for the murukku and ‘mixture’.

Murukku



Nirojinika firmly presses the mold in one go

For two kilos steamed and roasted wheat flour a kilo of gram flour is sifted and added. Salt and water from ground garlic is added to flour and kneaded to a dough. After frying, chilli powder is sprinkled and tossed to give a spicy and crunchy taste. Chilli powder should not be added in the initial stage, since this breaks while frying. Our stomachs started to grumble as the spicy aromas filled the air.

Mixture

Thin strips of mixture are fried first

For the making of ‘mixture’, a kilo of powdered white raw rice was weighed and added to a bowl. Thereafter 500g of gram flour was sifted and added. Salt to taste and a pinch of food colouring as well as water from the soaked grounded garlic was kneaded into the dough. “The addition of gram flour gives the soft and crunchy texture,” said Jeevaranjini. The garlic pulp was not added, it is kept to be fried and

added later. For this too, a customised frame with a sieve like structure was used.

Nirojinika placed the rectangular frame on top of the frying pan and took the kneaded dough and quickly rubbed it over the surface and tiny pieces of dough fell into the hot oil. The frame was washed immediately after to avoid the flour drying on the frame. For the final touches, Jeevaranjini took a tray of chickpea, green pea, manioc chips, Bengal gram, peanut and curry leaves. These were all fried together with the garlic. With the fried dough, then everything was tossed together and served warm.

> A trip to Jaffna would not be complete without tasting a mouthful of these spicy bites.

Jeevaranjini ensures that the ingredients for making these snacks are readily available at home to meet the demands of her clientele.

Many from far and near place orders to take these yummy treats across the island and abroad to share with their families and friends. We were surprised to see plates of fresh, crispy Jaffna snacks neatly displayed in a tray before us in a mere matter of minutes.

It had definitely been an interesting morning making these special Northern snacks. Remember, a trip to Jaffna would not be complete without tasting a mouthful of these crunchy, spicy bites. The aroma and crispiness keeps one wanting for more.

The traditions and flavours of the Jaffna snacks lingered in our minds as we bid adieu to K Pararajasekaran and P Sri Jeevaranjini.







