



Parameswari exhibiting her culinary flair

A new day had dawned in Kilinochchi. Rays of sunlight were starting to gradually filter through the trees as we made our way to Naguleswaran Parameswari's house. The dim light from her kitchen window and the smoke that came out of the kitchen chimney told us she had already welcomed the day. Upon seeing our arrival, she hurried to the door and greeted us with a friendly "kālai vanakam" (good morning).

Words Hansani Bandara and Bhavani Balasuntharam **Photographs** Indika De Silva and Dilshi Thathsarani

The sweet aroma of hoppers—the dish of the day—tantalised our senses as we entered Parameswari's kitchen. Milk hoppers or Paalappam is a popular food in Sri Lanka and the southern part of neighbouring India. It is the Asian equivalent of pancakes and is greatly enjoyed and loved by many, be it old or young.

Parameswari's kitchen, though small in size was kept neat. Thus, all the ingredients were neatly placed on a winnowing fan. It only takes two to three cups of flour, milk from one coconut, five tablespoons of sugar, a pinch of salt and yeast and gingelly oil to make milk hoppers. Of course, Parameswari by instinct knows just the amount of ingredients to add, to get that perfect texture and taste of the hoppers.

According to her, the most important step when preparing milk hoppers is getting the consistency, which has to take a thick creamy texture. She said if hoppers are to be made in the morning, the batter has to be prepared the previous night, as it has to be kept for ten hours to ferment. She stirred the batter and took a spoonful to show us; the white creamy mixture had arrived at just the right consistency and everything was set to begin the preparation of this delicious feast.

The rhythmic movements of Parameswari's hands reminded us of a well-choreographed dance. She took a scoopful of batter, poured it into the wok and twirled it for the batter to spread. Then she poured a spoonful of coconut milk to the middle and placed it on the

cooker. These set of steps were repeated twice over and at the conclusion three small woks sat on the cooker. After about two to three minutes, with a swift movement she lifted the lids of the three woks placed on the cooker to check if the hoppers were cooked.

Gradually, the sweet aroma of hoppers started to tingle our taste buds and made our mouths water as freshly made hoppers—one by one—were taken off the fire, placed on kenda leaves and then on a winnowing fan. What a delightful sight! We were all smiles since we knew what came next was the best part—the tasting! It was all worth the wait for it was delicious indeed.

Parameswari had to set off to begin her daily ride around the city in her scooter to sell freshly made milk hoppers, which was her source of earning. We bid adieu to Parameswari and took our leave, promising to try the recipe ourselves.

Ingredients

- **Two to three cups of flour (Made from grinded White Nadu, a type of raw rice)**
- **Milk from one coconut**
- **Five tablespoons of sugar**
- **A pinch of salt and yeast**
- **Gingelly oil**

Method

- **The first step in the method of preparation is making the batter.**
- **Mix the two cups of flour and one tablespoon of salt and sugar each and a pinch yeast with lukewarm water.**
- **Keep the mixture for about ten hours for fermentation.**
- **Add coconut milk to the batter and mix well.**
- **Keep a small wok on the cooker, add gingelly oil and let it heat.**
- **Pour a spoonful of batter and turn the wok slowly so that the batter spreads.**
- **Add a spoonful of coconut milk at the center.**
- **Leave it for two to three minutes and take off the wok.**
- **Serve hot on a kenda (Mercaranga Peltata) leaf.**

Milk Hoppers Creamy And Milky Goodness

