

Food connoisseur Arjuni Ranatunga, in recalling her fond childhood memories of the island's culture and heritage intertwined with food, has embarked on an exciting journey that is sure to reawaken your sense of pleasure and satisfaction. Cliched as it may sound, authentic food comes back through the latest food label 'Puduma Rahak' launched by Arjuni Ranatunga. Her flavorful options will not disappoint your palette.

Words Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

Puduma Rahak: Amazing Authentic Tastes



Arjuni is a recipe collector, researcher, and experimenter. She's the cook extraordinaire who indulges in the art of cooking. Arjuni Ranatunga is the new face of our vibrant online 'food nation,' revolutionizing the take-out culture in unprecedented ways. Her endearing Facebook pseudonym 'Veddhi' – the indigenous woman whose brand 'Puduma Rahak' is churning out a motley of foods has been received with open arms in Sri Lanka and abroad within a short period of launching.

Fondly known as Veddhi among friends, the name pinning resulted from her famous association with the indigenous community in Sri Lanka. As the daughter of a Police Officer serving in Mahiyangana, where the indigenous people lived, Arjuni enjoyed her visits to the Veddah territory. The spirited foodie that she was even then, young Arjuni, was curious to learn about indigenous dietary habits. That spurred her to explore the 'limited edition' world of specialties prepared by the native community. Another marker for the affectionate name is her frizzy hair, which Arjuni thinks caught the chieftain's attention to whom she was an 'adopted' daughter.

So, what's unique about Puduma Rahak and its value proposition? Arjuni Ranatunga sets herself apart in the modern foodscape of fusion food, religiously standing by authentic tastes as a tribute to tradition, culture, and heritage. She associates food from her childhood with warm feelings and good memories. They have a personal value and an expression of cultural identity. She wants to cherish those memories by retaining the ornateness, taste, and nutrition.

Her brand Puduma Rahak means an amazing taste, a name inspired by her associates who gave their food reviews in two simple words – fantastic taste. Such passion for cooking that Arjuni would embark on cooking sprees, which ended with her serving her near and dear, whose collective chorus of appreciation was that her food tastes amazing. Well then, why not proposition her new business as amazing taste?

Puduma Rahak was launched in December 2021. Always the food buff dishing out fabulous food for the love of cooking, Arjuni left her job as a television news producer to pursue education in England in 2010. She spent 12 years studying and working. While overseas, she continued dabbling in her favorite cooking hobby and shared extraordinary insights into juices on her 'Juice for Life' Facebook page. Returning to Sri Lanka in May 2021, Arjuni received rave reviews for her Facebook posts as she continued her sojourn with food. As December approached, encouraged by her husband George, Arjuni decided to lunge into the food business. With a fastidious demeanor, her value proposition was ready in two weeks in time for Christmas 2021.

Making a statement at the outset, Arjuni's hamper of Christmas goodies in a Palmyrah leaf basket was a delightful new combination of the Sinhala New Year sweets and Christmas Cake, merging her unique eastern yuletide flavor with the characteristically festive Christmas cake. Many were skeptical when she unveiled her offering. Will people depart from the norm, where the Christmas celebration was symbolized by food adaptations and derivatives from colonial influence? Her gamble paid off. Arjuni made a paradigm shift of sorts, bringing the tastes of the native new year's festive table to the festive table at Christmas. People embraced the native flair to the latest twist. Her combo was overwhelmingly appreciated, and orders for the same began to pour in, which extended to the dawn of 2022, producing hosts of gratified gourmands. The offering was genuinely creative, a blend of environmentally friendly handwoven reed baskets laden with sweets from a native festival.

Her success story combines ingenuity, creativity, and commitment to taste and quality. In a copycat food culture of blends, dilutions, and charlatan experts, Arjuni would make the same thing differently. As a habitual recipe collector, who shared her findings of longstanding recipes with friends on cooking groups, she set herself apart as the specialist in authentic food. As a newbie in the online food industry, Arjuni received that vital fillip that any newcomer desires from her food group buddies, who unveiled her as a cook extraordinaire.

Her collection of clay-pot-packed pickles under the Saru Achcharu tag is a testament to her commitment to authenticity. Pickles are made from jackfruit and lasia, and the unique Sinhala Achcharu boasts a complex mix of ingredients that makes it spicy and pungent. The banana blossom mixed with dried baby shrimp, the Malay Pickle, mango, and ambarella curry is a gateway into our everyday cuisine. Intrepid food hunters can discover a heritage through their food, a food culture that balances flavors, color, and nutrition.

The good thing is that as an experimenter and researcher, Arjuni has tested her different recipes against spoilage. Preserving food in the old days was facilitated by the ingredients and utensils used to store them in, which continues with her pickles thanks to this food expert's commitment. Her sojourn into Sri Lanka's food heritage continues with delightful sweets such as Peni Walalu, soft rings of honey glistening in translucent freshness. Her cashew-based Cadju Aluva is no longer a charade that many had made it to be, but a heady mix of Ulundu flour (Urad) with a great fusion of ground cashew, making it stand as a testament to the name. The new culture of reviving some of those sweet tastes that have gone to be in the backburner of the country's food lexicon is evident in Dandila Aluva. It's a lovely sweet that gets its looks from the beautiful shade of mauve in the Rajali yam. This very nutritious variety had lost its glory in the breakfast table for some time now. Indulging

once in a while in the sweetness oozing semolina-based Rulang Aluwa and sesame-based Thala Aluwa and Thala Dosi makes it worth the while. It's easy to navigate through Arjuni's food repertoire as her business model is created by promoting a concept based on three labels.

The quirky Mukulu will bring a smile to everyone's face as per its meaning.

Puduma Rahak is the primary business under which Arjuni sells her range of sweetmeats and confections, distinctive Sri Lankan foods such as sour fish curry wrapped in the betelnut tree husk, and the sought after sweet and savory eggplant-based 'Batu Moju'. Saru Achcharu includes the various pickles and the popular range of fruit-based relishes that are a portion of popular street food. Maru Bite has a range of deep-fried mixtures of gram and sprats, the conception allowing her to continually optimize the quality of her offer. So, when she posts her next big undertaking on social media, she selects the range, with Wednesday set aside for accepting orders duly delivered to anywhere in the country on Friday and Saturday.

The cornerstone of her heritage food concept is taste and quality assured by adhering to the most authentic and original recipe available among the sea of replicas, with hand-picked ingredients, which are ground and prepared at home and sourced from the best suppliers. The compromise people make when they look for cheap versions of their favorite dish is obviously, they come at the cost of quality and artificial taste. She said that investing in only the best ingredients is the portal to our heritage.

A trailblazer in her own right, Arjuni's entrepreneurial launch is a fun project that hinges on a set of rock-hard values. Rather than being the regular restaurateur churning out food to suit customers' altered palettes, she decides her menu in advance and promotes it on Facebook. However, the more profound quest is to change people's food mindset. That food reflects culture, where traditional cuisine is passed down from one generation to another. That food is about history and livelihoods. Hence, they don't deserve to be compromised. The best way to preserve some of our authentic food for posterity is by sharing recipes and making them with authentic ingredients so that today's fast-food culture doesn't cloud the tastes of some of the dearly known native fare, explained Arjuni. With the list already complete for the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, new on Arjuni's palette is a range of 'fun' sweets that has evaded the local food wordlist for a long time. Uda Balum means one has to look up to eat this stuffed papadum-like delicacy lest the filling spills, the quirky Mukulu will bring a smile to everyone's face as per its meaning, Komala Watan is an oil cake that gets its

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name from the spirals around them. More plans are ongoing for some delicious new spicy offerings made from river fish, such as fish-based pickles, with a combination of fruit.

Wishing Arjuni's endeavor a great success to stand uniquely in the food market, with a touch of remarkable flair and a twist in the delicacies to indulge in.

Puduma Rahak

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Arjuni Ranatunga, Founder of Puduma Rahak.

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Peni Walalu.



Dandila Aluva prepared from Rajali yam.

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Saru Achcharu offers a range of authentic flavors of pickles packed in clay pots.



Komala Watan.

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Mukulu

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Dandila Aluva will add sweetness to your breakfast meal.

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Pick a favorite choice from the deep-fried mixtures of gram and sprats from the 'Maru Bite' range.

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Adding a touch of creativity to packing.