Recipes for Reconciliation



National Peace Council of Sri Lanka

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Foreword

We live in a country of diversity where people of different ethnicities, religions, and cultures, and speaking different languages, live together. We must live together peacefully and productively to overcome our challenges.

Sri Lanka is currently facing an economic crisis and previously we faced a long drawn-out ethnic war. The goal of the National Peace Council is to see that our country becomes a plural society in both constitutional form and on the ground, where our diversity is acknowledged and space is provided for our different talents to flourish and complement each other.

In this book, NPC presents work it has been doing through the use of food and culinary arts to build mutual understanding and appreciation between people of different ethnicities, religions, and cultures. Food is an important part of our lives. It also reflects our plurality and provides insights into our preferences and cultural practices.

Food is not only about our different cultures, it is also about our different regions, where those who are minorities in a national context are majorities in a regional context. When food items that are available in one part of the country are less common in other parts, there is a diversity of menus. Food is also about our history and how we have incorporated foods from other parts of the world and made them ours.

At the same time, food and its preparation can also be a contested space. Unless understood in their proper context, some of our practices can be viewed negatively by those of different cultures and ethnicities. NPC was mindful that just like our history, culture, and politics, food too could get caught in the divisions of the day. Therefore, education and awareness creation activities always preceded the food we shared.

Our effort to compile and publish this book was to identify, elaborate and document the plural culinary culture of Sri Lanka - as a reconciliation catalyst. This book includes the various recipes of culinary cultures of 'others' – of the majority on the minority's view and of the minority on the majority's view, and how those recipes and their embedded cultures harness a plural culture. It also includes various narratives behind those recipes - how people built relationships around those food cultures.

The success of this project was due to the dedicated contribution of staff and our partner organizations in the field who spared no effort to organize food festivals in the face of many obstacles, including the Covid pandemic, which delayed the implementation of field activities across the board. We also wish to acknowledge with gratitude the support of Amnesty International for this project and to our long-standing partner Misereor for providing financial support for this publication.

Jehan Perera
Executive Director
National Peace Council

Youth perspectives on Sri Lankan food culture

Food is an essential factor to sustain life. Scientific data reveals that humans have struggled to find food since their origin as human beings and have experimented with types of food based on geography and weather changes. The first humans thrived on raw food and thereafter shifted to cooked food, with the invention of fire which led to a significant change in dietary patterns. Islanders depended on seafood while dry zone dwellers tended to be more carnivorous and human civilizations set up next to riverine ecosystems discovered agriculture. Based on these differences, dietary patterns were developed and accepted as being specific to each community. Over time, this food became part and parcel of these communities and part of their culture. This publication explores the diversity of food among different communities in the country. It is also an attempt to capture the interest of Sri Lankan youth who appear to have limited knowledge of the diverse nature of our cuisine.

Food brings people together regardless of ethnic or religious differences. Today, more and more people show increased interest to experiment with food from other cultures and have acquired a taste for it in the long term. People have begun to appreciate unique aspects of food but have not taken the time to understand the historical and cultural aspects that make this food unique to each community or region. True appreciation can only come from understanding the nuances and stories behind each dish, that we appreciate and enjoy without knowing its backstory. Knowledge of the unique aspects of each community will also support our efforts toward making reconciliation true.

The program Youth perspectives on Sri Lankan food culture were designed and implemented to further the engagement of youth in reconciliation-related activities. Youth including university students and students in advanced level grades, and members of youth-led organizations in the selected districts participated in this activity. They were mentored by members of NPC's district inter-religious committees. This project was implemented in 8 districts with over 100 participants at each activity. The activity included the preparation and tasting of different cuisine, cultural items from communities in that area, awareness of inclusion, etc. The project was carried out in Monaragala, Badulla, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Batticaloa, Matara, Kegalle, and Negombo districts and was supported by relevant state officers and members of the National Youth Services Council in those locations.

Saman Seneviratne
Project Manager
National Peace Council

Food and reconciliation

We were fortunate to have an opportunity to implement a series of activities to appreciate and evaluate the diversity of Sri Lanka's food culture in several locations including in the north and east. Growing up in a predominantly homogenous locality in the Ratnapura district, I had limited knowledge of the types of food consumed by other communities. Even during university, I did not have an opportunity to taste cuisine different from ours. This changed when I became involved in this project by coordinating activities. For the first time in my life, I learned about different types of cuisine and the history behind them.

The activities in Monaragala, Badulla, Anuradhapura, Jaffna, Batticaloa, Matara, Kegalle, and Gampaha, showed us the diversity in food types which differed from place to place. We realized that while rice flour is used to make 'Kavum' in Anuradhapura and Matara, in Moneragala and Badulla, communities use 'Horse Gram flour' or Kollu as a substitute for rice flour to make "Horse Gram Kavum" (Kollu Kavum). Furthermore, the types of treacle used also differ depending on the type of sweet and region. The Palmyra treacle is commonly used for making sweets in the Northern Province where the palmyra tree is found aplenty and is embedded in their culture. In the South, sweets are made using caramelized sugar and Kithul treacle. 'Getting the treacle to the correct consistency' is critical for sweets as it is the treacle that holds and binds the other ingredients together. During the activity in Negombo, we noted that people in Negombo used a different term for maintaining consistency- peni path kireema.

The activity in the Eastern Province was carried out in Batticaloa with a large number of youth participants from nearby Kattankudy. Youth representing the Sinhala community noted that they had Agar Agar and Kozhukattai, types of cuisine representative of Muslim and Tamil communities, for the first time in their lives.

The activity in Jaffna was held in Nawakkuli and youth from the south and members of NPC's Galle district inter-religious committee joined us on the journey to Jaffna where they also carried out an additional activity by donating books and stationery items for children of low-income families. The cooking competition organized after the volleyball match contributed to building great fellowship between youth from the North and the South. Youth from the North had a great interest in knowing how 'Konda Kavum' were made in the South and a Tamil youth tried his hand at making 'Konda Kavum' thereafter.

Food is a key factor that affects the existence of everyone. We believe that this work contributed towards strengthening the reconciliation process by giving youth a space to enjoy and understand diversity through the food and cultural values of different communities.

Ayesha Jayawardene
Senior Project Officer
National Peace Council

A reconciled society by appreciating the diversity of food

The valuable message given by the Red Indian Chief Seattle is that our lives are necessarily connected with the environment we live in. Irrespective of race and religion, all humans are dependent upon the environment. There is no point in clashing with one another when everyone feels equally thirsty and hungry irrespective of racial and religious differences. Therefore, appreciating the diversity of food is an important factor that will contribute towards reconciliation and there is no better time than now to begin.

Food is an essential factor that determines the existence of every living being on earth. It is enunciated in Lord Buddha's words that "There is none other than food for the wellbeing of individuals who are born and for the sustenance of individuals who are yet to be born" (Anguttara Nikaya 1960:830). There is an everlasting relationship between food and humans that cannot be broken. Therefore, food is a social subject. The concept of food is embedded in the social diversity of prestige, power, wealth, health, advancement, and even race and religion. Various social aspects are implied through the traditional food culture unique to Sri Lanka, a country in the South-Asian region.

Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country and a food culture that is unique to various racial and religious identities has been created over time centering on their locations of settlement. The local food culture that emerged with agriculture and irrigation is now changing. Development and globalization led man to become politicized paving the way to communal disharmony today under the guise of religion and nationality. But many are not ready to accept that as humans our needs are the same- that food, water, and air are basic needs that we all require. This is the reality we need to understand.

Humans consider milk as a symbol of prosperity and make various food items using it. Sinhala Buddhists make milk rice using milk and ghee for the Sinhala and Tamil New Year. Likewise, Tamil Hindus make Pongal Rice for Thai Pongal- the basic ingredient being rice, milk, and ghee. In addition, they add jaggery, raisins, and dates to sweeten the rice. Despite small differences in the type of ingredients used, the two food items are fundamentally the same. Despite being communities in one country that share such similarities, it is sad to note that we are still unable to fully reconcile with one another and live without conflict.

Commonly, the same rice is cooked in Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim homes but is differently made. In a Muslim home, they add various flavors, colors, and meat items to make yellow rice, ghee rice, and biriyani based on their cultural and religious

identity. When we take out the cultural identity from the rice, it is just rice cooked and eaten by all. At present, these are enjoyed by everyone notwithstanding cultural and religious identities.

Rice kanji or Conjee is a type of nutritional food that Muslims consume, especially during Ramadan Iftar or the breaking of their fast. It is similar to 'Kola Kanda' made with medicinal herbs and rice of the Sinhalese. This beverage is made by them with sago instead of rice and additionally with jaggery, raisins, and kitul treacle. Tamils make a similar item called 'Payasam'.

Food such as roti, paratha, dosa, ulundu vadai, vegetable roti, noodles, cutlets, rolls, and kottu, which are an integral part of Sri Lankan cuisine are types of food that have come our way from neighboring India and other western countries. Food items that represent other diverse cultures have become a staple in our homes showing how food can create inter-cultural bonds and lead to reconciliations. In addition, Watalappam, part of Muslim food culture is a popular dessert in every community. Sweets such as Boondi, cashew halwa, and milk toffees have their origins elsewhere but are enjoyed by everyone across all communities in Sri Lanka.

We may share our food and traditions but we are still separated by our lack of knowledge and understanding of the other based on race and religion. We hesitate to mingle with, share things with, and acknowledge others' opinions- a weakness that will keep us separated forever. This is a situation that needs to change if we are to embrace pluralism. On the premise that food brings people together across conflict divides, this activity was carried out to highlight the pluralistic nature of Sri Lanka and promote reconciliation.

N.M. Amila Nuwan Madushanka
Senior Project Officer
National Peace Council

Peace-building among communities through diversity in food culture

Diversity in food cultures is one of the unique factors in terms of cultural diversity in any community. But, instead of leading to cause segregation, food cultures should identify the beauty of diversity finally paving the way to social cohesion.

The majority of Sri Lankans are Sinhala, Tamils, and Muslims while there are minorities such as Malays, Burghers, Telugu, and Ceylon Kafirs. There is a similarity in food cultures among the communities when the staple food becomes rice and curry while roti, hoppers, and pittu become additional cuisines irrespective of their significant identities and dynamics in dietary patterns. But in the context of politics (the reason for them to be considered political matters is that they have arisen aiming at centralization of power) in Sri Lanka, there is some tendency among different communities to reject the cuisine of the other. For instance, there appears to be a strong dislike among the Sinhala people towards Muslims because they eat beef. This dislike can be attributed to the use of the cow in agriculture which is part and parcel of the way of life and the attitude of empathy that Buddhism brings. However, this intense rejection of Muslims over beef eating is a new feature, the result of deep political machinations.

Let us analyze it with the Chinese food culture. They consume anything as food. According to a satire, "Chinese people eat everything except the chair they sit on and the table on which the food is served." The reason for their culture of eating everything is to get rid of hunger. As the largest population of the world where land was a limited resource, their principal object was to eliminate hunger through the diversity of food culture and thereafter those substitutes became very delicious dishes. Furthermore, fried spiders are a delicacy sold in the food markets of Phnom Penh, the capital city of Cambodia. According to them, they cannot recall having eaten spiders for over a hundred years. People have survived feeding on fried spiders hiding in jungles during the brutal reign of Pol Pot and the habit continued even after they went back to eating eat plant-based food. That is also the reason behind the similarity and the diversity of food culture created based on the respective religions, namely, similarities among Christians and Muslims, and similarities among Buddhists and Hindus. In a debate investigating the real reasons behind this diversity, one can initially break the attitude of degenerating cultural identities.

Culture is something dynamic, and similarly, food cultures are also dynamic and unique. Certain similar aspects can be observed in the diversity of food cultures of the three major communities according to the distribution of population in Sri Lanka and its geographical location. The cuisine of the Sinhala community has originated from non-Sinhala roots. Favourites such as hoppers, string hoppers, and pittu, originated in Kerala, South India. Kurakkan Thalapa is popular among the Sinhala while indigenous people of Mexico enjoy Corn Thalapa. Kavum is intrinsically connected with the Sinhalese but Kavum and Aggala were inherited from the Tamils. There are similarities between the Dodol of the Sinhala and the Muscat of the Muslims, with variations in the types of ingredients used and recipes. The senses of taste and appearance of these sweets also differ. Coconut oil and sesame oil or ghee are used by the Sinhala and Tamil communities, respectively, for tempering curries. The taste of the chicken curry made by Muslims differs from the same curry made by others. Further analysis shows that the quantity of spices used by the three communities varies from one to another. Therefore, the same dish can come up with different tastes based on their identity.

Myths about food culture and ethnocentric ideas can be eliminated by discussing these unique features and similarities and by discovering the reasons behind the origin of each food culture. Thus, this can create a platform of peace highlighting the beauty and the similarity relevant to various food cultures.

Lasantha de Silva
Journalist, Coordinator-Inter-religious committee, Badulla district

Reconciliation in my experience

One day, I was introduced to the National Peace Council (NPC) by the two brothers Dhammika and Chandana, through the district inter-religious committee. I was already a member of the fifth Youth Parliament and the first topic I presented as a youth member at the Parliament was "Reconciliation". Growing up around a multi-ethnic/religious community where Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, and their respective religions were all present, I was experiencing reconciliation practically.

Eager to be part of an effort I traveled to the North as part of the group that went on the food culture expedition from the South. I participated in this program without any hesitation. Although this was my first experience with the NPC, I made friends with many after Sadeesh Aiya spoke to us in Anuradhapura in the morning on the 10th. After having fun with the group along the way, we arrived in Jaffna by nightfall.

Here begins the best story. In short, the hospitality offered by the chief incumbent of Naga Viharaya made us think that we were living in the South. But different dialects, different sounds, different flavors of dishes, and the smell of toddy from palmyra trees made us realize that we are in fact in Jaffna. The first day ended with introductions and getting to know one another. We were busy the next day as we, from the South, were involved in the deed of distributing items that we gathered from the south to brothers and sisters of the North to establish reconciliation practically. We all played games together which led to building a brotherhood.

I will never forget people like Darun and Sadha. Although we are not professional volleyball players, our national sport, we enjoyed playing it together. My favourite program was the cultural program. We sang songs, danced, and ate fish and crab fried by young people in the North and even tasted watalappan, kavum, and ulundu vadai. There is no doubt that everyone felt the feeling of 'Sri Lankanness' regardless of whether we were Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim or Catholic.

We all shared the same feeling of "one country - one nation" when we had meals, enjoyed, played, and shared experiences. None of us felt any difference between being either Northern or Southern.

Even though "politicians" from the North and the South struggle with each other for power, we expected to go on a journey together as a country. In a nutshell, reconciliation is worthwhile if all of us are together irrespective of the places where we are from. I wholeheartedly thank the attempt of NPC staff to build the bridge of reconciliation. The program was 100% successful.

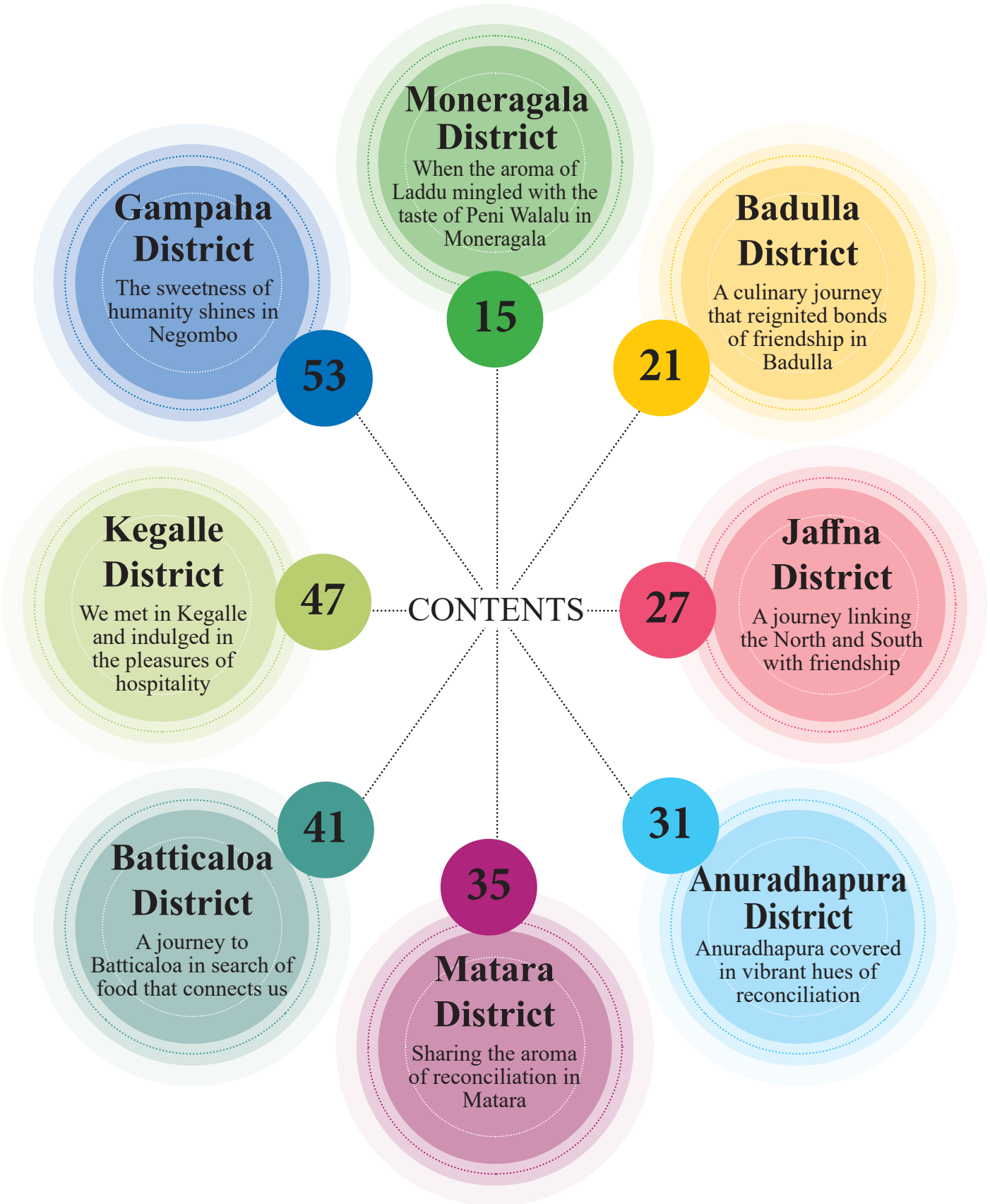
And I appreciate unity, harmony, friendship, and cooperation. I left a lot of the memories in Jaffna when I returned home. Finally, I, on behalf of the youth sincerely request you organize more programs like this to strengthen this unity.

"May the bridge between the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, and Catholic built from the South to the North, from the coconut palms to the palmyra palms, last forever!"

And I appreciate the unity, harmony, friendship and cooperation. I left a lot of the memories in Jaffna when I returned home. Finally, I, on behalf of the youth sincerely request you to organize more programs like this in order to strengthen this unity.

“May the bridge of Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Catholic being built from the South to the North, from the coconut palms to the palmyra palms, last forever!”

Harsha Chaturanga Sandaruwan
Youth Parliament Member
Monaragala District Inter Religus Committee


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Introduction

Historical evidence points to diversity and a pluralistic approach to how Sri Lanka's culture evolved over 2500 years. Human history shows diverse societies and mixed groups of people who interacted with each other in their day-to-day interactions. In more modern times, conflicts based on religion and ethnicity have affected countries all over the world and not just Sri Lanka. As a country, we suffered through 30 years of war based on ethnicity and it appears that such divisions are re-emerging around the world, once again.

The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka has worked for peace and reconciliation for over 25 years now. The organization has acted as a mediator by bringing communities together through its different work programmes. This activity is supported by Amnesty International to continue our work by especially engaging with youth to address and eliminate Islamophobia. Through this youth-centered food culture programme, NPC used the diversity of cuisine to bring different communities together.

Sri Lanka is a country with a multi-religious and multi-ethnic identity and this program was carried out island-wide in eight such mixed districts (Monaragala, Badulla, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Matara, Batticaloa, Kegalle, and Gampaha). The target group was youth representing different religious and ethnic identities. Building a pluralistic society through food culture was the main purpose of this program. The target group was selected with the expectation that they can be motivated to build a society where all communities are treated with dignity, respect, and on equal terms. The support given by district and local inter-religious committees (DIRCs and LIRCs) to empower youth who participated in the program should be appreciated. Their guidance and encouragement would inculcate the said purposes in the target group. Apart from the main purpose of building a pluralistic society, another objective was to make youth aware of the intricate relationship that exists between food and culture.

The total participants included 305 Sinhala youth, 195 Tamil youth, and 98 Muslim youth who took part in activities across the eight districts. They included 283 males and 315 females. In addition, 81 Sinhala, 32 Tamil, and 29 Muslim (97 male representation and 45 female representatives) DIRC members and, 23 male and 10 female members from LIRCs participated. The programme was further strengthened by the participation of 37 Buddhist, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu religious leaders who further enriched the spiritual reconciliation of youth and guided them along the correct path.

Moneragala District

The inaugural activity of a series of activities organized by the NPC with support from Amnesty International to address islamophobia in Sri Lanka kickstarted in the Moneragala district, the second largest district of Sri Lanka. Moneragala has a land area of 5,636 km2 and a population of 451,058 as per the Census of Population and Housing carried out in 2012. Of this, 94.9% are Sinhalese, 1.8% are Sri Lankan Tamil, 1.1% are Indian Tamil and 2.1% are Muslim.[1] Accordingly, the Sinhala community is the majority in the Moneragala district.

Buddhists (94.6%), Hindus (2.6%), Islamic (2.1%), Roman Catholics (0.3%), and Christians (0.1%) make up the religious landscape of Moneragala.[2] This indicates that Buddhists are the majority in the Moneragala district.

The Moneragala district inter-religious committee includes religious leaders, community leaders, members of the Mediation Board, government officials, journalists, university students, representatives of the Youth Parliament, local government representatives, and professionals in various sectors. It is an important group that works towards establishing an inclusive society in their locality and the country as a whole.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Watalappan"

Ingredients

250g of kithul jaggery
250g of sugar
5 eggs
1 cup of thick coconut milk
2 tsp of vanilla
Water - as needed
Nutmeg - as needed
Cardamom - as needed (per taste)
A piece of cinnamon peel (per taste)
Salt to taste

Method

First, grate kitul jaggery finely and add some water to dissolve it. Put a bowl on the flame and add sugar. When sugar dissolves, add cardamom powder and cinnamon powder. Stir well until it becomes rup. Turn off the flame and let it cool. Then add jaggery, eggs and, milk while whisking until well combined. After straining, add vanilla and nutmeg powder. Then steam for about one hour. It can be served after cooling.

Watalappan is an essential part of the food served by Muslims during some of their religious festivals. There is no Ramazan without 'Serikaya' or Watalappan for Malays. The method of preparing this dish may vary from place to place.

History of Watalappam

This is known as 'Watalappan', 'Watalappam', and 'Serikaya' by the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Sri Lankan Malays, respectively. Watalappan is considered to be custard pudding made with coconut milk, jaggery, cashew, eggs, and a hint of spices including cardamom and cloves. Some people use nutmeg and vanilla as substitutes. This dish is believed to have been brought to Sri Lanka by Sri Lankan Malays who moved from Indonesia during the Dutch reign.

The name, Watalappam, could have been derived from the Tamil words Vattil (cup) and Appam (cake). The dessert has come to be strongly identified with the Muslim community in Sri Lanka and is part of the traditional Eid al-Fitr celebrations, marking the end of Ramazan. It is also popular during weddings, religious festivals, and other social functions and celebrations. This dish is enjoyed by all ethnicities and religions today leaving aside all differences.

"Watalappan" was also prepared in Jaffna and Anuradhapura districts to represent Muslim culture during this programme.

"Peni Walalu"

(Undu Walalu)



Method

Put wheat flour, rice flour, and undu flour into a bowl and mix them well. Dissolve yeast with normal water and keep it aside. Then, put the dissolved yeast, coconut milk, and normal water into the flour mixture and mix them into a smooth paste. Let the batter ferment for one or more hours. If you need coloured Pani Walalu, add a drop of any colouring to this batter.

After the batter is fermented, heat oil in a large frying pan on medium heat. When the oil is ready, make Pani Walalu using a piece of cloth that has a small hole or a Pani Walalu maker. Put sugar and water as needed into a saucepan on medium heat to make the sugar syrup. Add liquid glucose and cream of tartar into it. Add salt as per your taste. Add pepper powder to make the syrup a bit spicy if needed. Then let fried Undu Walalu soak in the sugar syrup and once they are well soaked, take them out and serve.

Ingredients

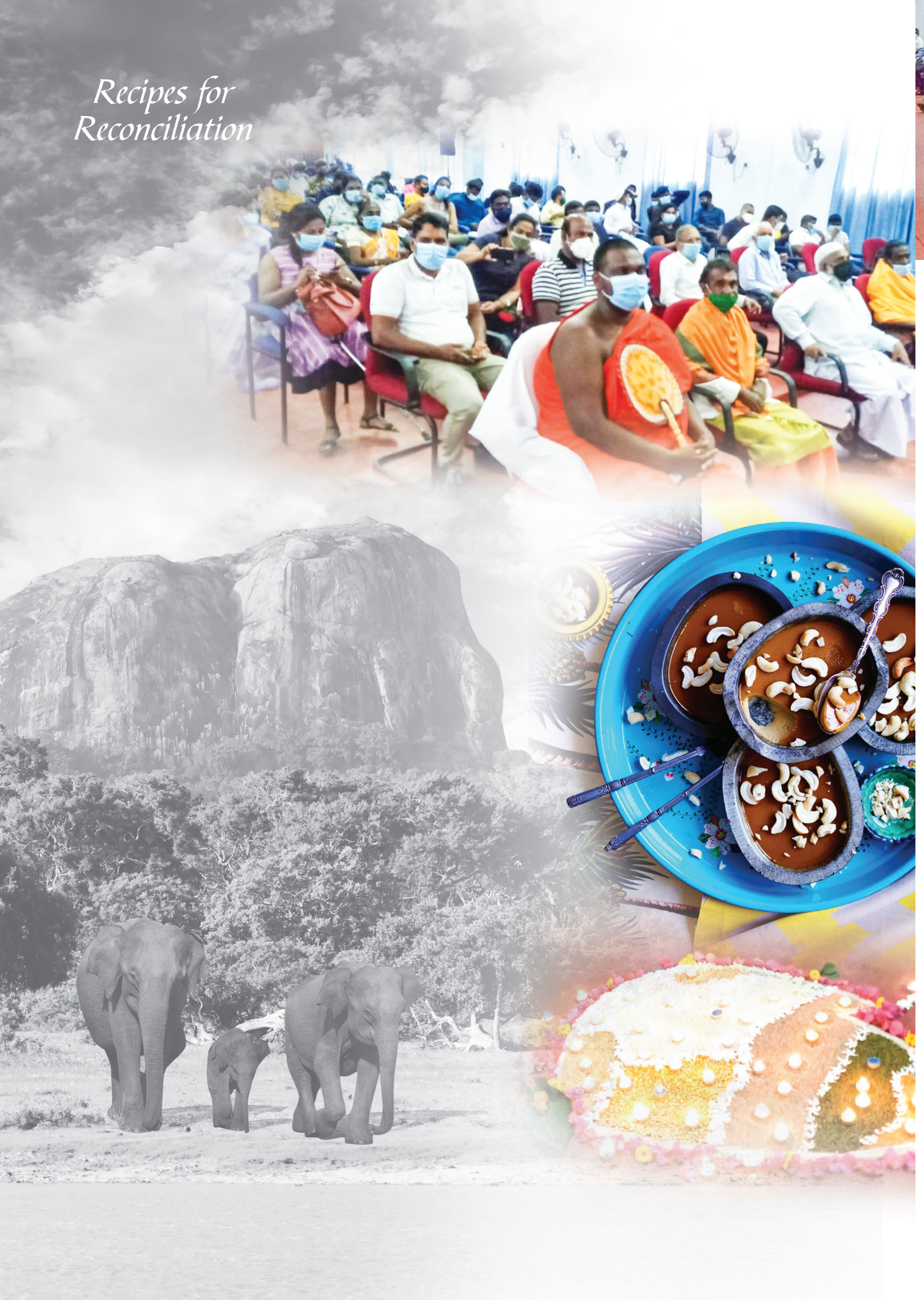
200g of rice flour
200g of wheat flour
100g of undu flour
750g of sugar
2 tsp of liquid glucose
2 tsp of cream of tartar
300 ml of water (1 ½ cups)
2 cups of coconut milk
1 tbsp of yeast
Salt to taste
Coconut oil - as necessary
(to fry undu wel)

History of Peni Walalu

Pani Walalu is a traditional sweet in Sri Lanka that carries different names- 'Komala Wadam' in ancient times, 'Undu Wel' in more recent history and 'Pani Walalu' at present. Pani Walau which was initially made in royal palaces became popular among Kandyan aristocrats. Although unique to Kandy, it is now popular among all the communities in Sri Lanka.

The Sinhala community considers Pani Walalu an indispensable sweet during the new year festival and special occasions. Thereafter, it became popular among every community demonstrating its cultural value.

Recipes for Reconciliation





When the aroma of Laddu mingled with the taste of Peni Walalu in Moneragala









The auditorium of the Moneragala library is a busy location hosting numerous cultural festivals, seminars, and discussions. Today it is the location for a very different event. It was the 4th of February 2021. The auditorium overflowed with youth from diverse backgrounds and members of the Moneragala DIRC. All seemed to be curious about the new activity that was about to start. The activity was a surprise as only the organizing committee was aware of the purpose behind this, which was to introduce the concept of pluralism and inclusion in a practical sense.

The participants included 57 youths (37 males and 20 females representing all the communities). They included Sinhalese (28), Tamils (17), and Muslims (12). In addition, there were 14 male and 14 female 0members representing the Moneragala inter-religious committee and including 22 Sinhalese, 3 Tamils and 3 Muslims. We were able to deliver a valuable message to all youth and DIRC members. The success of this program is noted in participant comments.

I am Muslim but no one can identify me as Muslim either by talking to me or by appearance. As a youth, I loved to try different dishes. I have tried out Peni Walalu, Watalappan and Laddu which were made today. But I was not aware that Peni Walalu and Laddu are associated with Sinhala and Tamil cultures, respectively. We enjoy every cuisine irrespective of their ethnic links. I think we have got it wrong somewhere. In my point of view, this program paved the way to the concept of 'One country in harmony' as we share different cuisines. I think, this program made us reflect on ourselves.

Mohammad Hanas
Bakinigahawela

I am a Sinhala Buddhist. All the communities including the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims live in our district. But I did not have a desire or did not want to have close relationships with them. It was a weakness I had which I realized today. We do have so many things to share in our cultures. This program is a good experience to understand the similarities that exist between our culture and the cultures of others. A positive attempt to make us think and look differently at society and its people.

K.M. Dilkarohini
Kahambana

The youth are the spirit of the country. The future lies in their hands. The youth in modern society are far away from nature. They do not care about trees, animals and nature around us. As humans, we should accustom ourselves to respect diversity. If not, we have no way to go. The concepts of human diversity and environmental diversity is equally important. We should protect the environment where we live in. This is a good initiative to bring the youth together and to eliminate deep-rooted traditional communal sentiments. I believe they will change our society for the better. I am ready to stand with them as a responsible citizen.

Additional District Secretary
Moneragala

A host of government officials including the District Secretary, Additional District Secretary, National Integration Officer, District Coordinator of Non-Governmental Organizations of the District Secretariat, and the chairperson of the Moneragala library participated. Some cultural events representing all communities added meaning to the activities. The food culture program held in Moneragala was a great support to promote pluralism and reconciliation.

Badulla
District

The second activity to create knowledge among youth on types of diverse cuisine enjoyed by different communities and address islamophobia was carried out in the Badulla district. It was supported by Amnesty International.

The Badulla district has an area of 4,387 km^2 and can be identified as a district with a multicultural environment. The total population of Badulla is 815,405 as per the Census of Population and Housing in 2012, of which 73% are Sinhala, 2.6% are Sri Lankan Tamils and 18.4% are Indian Tamils, while there are 5.4% Muslims.[1] Accordingly, it is clear that the Sinhalese are the majority in the Badulla district. As per their religion, 72.5%, 19.3%, 5.7%, 1.4%, and 0.8% of the total population are Buddhists, Hindus, Islamic, Roman Catholics, and Christians, respectively,[2] which indicates that Buddhists are the majority in the Badulla district. Economically, Badulla is dependent on the plantation economy and people live in the midst of social, economic, and political conflicts.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Laddu"

Ingredients

250g of Gram flour

½ litre of ghee

400g of sugar

Cashew - as needed

Raisins - as needed

Salt to taste

Vanilla essence

Method

Put gram flour, salt and vanilla essence into a bowl and add some water and blend it well (as with the consistency of the hopper batter). Now, heat ghee in a large (deep) frying pan. Place a perforated ladle on top of the oil and add some of the batter. Slowly, let the batter fall in the oil and cook them on a low flame, till properly cooked. Once done, place them on a tissue paper to remove excess oil. Deep fry or pan fry cashews and raisins. Then, place another pan on the flame and add some water and sugar, allow this blend to boil until it attains a two-string consistency (to make the sugar syrup). Then, add fried pieces, cashews and raisins into the syrup to mix well. Now, grease your hands with a little ghee and start shaping the laddus. Now you can serve them.

History of Laddu

People have been paying attention to cuisine since ancient times. Among them, Laddu an Indian sweet has a long history. 'Laddu' is a circular-shaped sweetmeat discovered by Indians. That is why became a popular sweet of the Indians. An associated tale in every region in India shows how popular it is. They believe that 'Sushruta', an ancient Indian physician used balls made of sesame seeds as a disinfectant to treat his patients. In addition, he also added bees honey, hers and nutritious seeds to this ball of sesame.

Since then, Laddu has become a popular food liked by all of us. No celebrations are there without Laddu in India. Laddu is a symbol of happiness or blessings at every function and celebration, weddings, engagements, when starting a business, childbirth, etc. Sweets in Hindu religion exhibit almighty love and trust. Laddu which was born in India, has become a popular sweet among the Sinhalese and Tamils since the migration of Indo-Aryans.

In the food culture program organized in the Monaragala district, "laddu" was prepared to represent Tamil culture.

"Pongal Rice"



Ingredients

1 cup of white rice
¼ a cup of green gram
1 ½ cups of jaggery
1 cup of coconut milk
3 cardamom pods
Sugar candy – small amount
1 small banana
2 tsp of ghee
10 cashew nuts
Some plums
Salt to taste

Method

Soak a cup of white rice for 30 minutes. Put one teaspoon of ghee into a heated plate. Add green gram and sauté for 2-3 minutes.

Now add 4 cups of water and 1 cup of milk. Drain soaked rice and add them to this mixture. Then add sugar candy, cardamom, salt and banana and mix them well together. Cook it closed for 15-20 minutes.

Now put 2 cups of water and 1 ½ cups of jaggery and cook until the right consistency is reached. Now strain the jaggery syrup and set aside. Meanwhile, mash the cooked rice and green gram well. Then add the syrup into the mixture and mix well. Put another bowl on the flame to add one teaspoon of Ghee, plum and cashew nuts until golden brown. Now add them to the rice mixture and serve it cut into pieces or as it is.

History of Pongal Rice

'Thai Pongal', the Festival of harvest, is annually celebrated worldwide by Tamils. It is embedded with the 'Dragon Invasion' celebrated in various regions in India. The Tamil word 'Pongal' means "boiling over/ overflow". Boiling over milk in a clay pot is considered a symbol of prosperity.

Pongal is actually a 4-day celebration. Day one is Bhogi, on which day worshippers burn any unwanted or old items, symbolizing the end of the old and the beginning of the new. Day two is Sarkarei or Weettu Pongal, the most important day of the festival. This falls on the first day of the month of Thai in the Hindu-Tamil calendar (14th - 15th of January). On this day, Pongal Rice is made from the new harvest of rice boiled in milk with jaggery which is later garnished with brown sugar, cashew and plums. The custom of 'boiling over' has given it the name Pongal. Tamils shout 'Pongal, Pongal' when milk is boiled over and the musical instrument 'Sangu' is played at that time. After the first part is offered to nature with the dawn of the sun which is a custom carried out to thank the sun and mother nature for the bountiful harvest, the remaining Pongal Rice is shared with family members.

Recipes for Reconciliation















A culinary journey that reignited bonds of friendship in Badulla









We reached Badulla on 6th February 2021 via Nuwara Eliya with memories of Moneragala still fresh in our minds. It made us realize that Badulla was also a fascinating location full of generous people. The second activity in the food culture series aimed at developing collaboration among communities and promoting pluralistic concepts in Badulla. All participants who joined the event held at the Riverside Hotel, including youth from each community and the members of the Badulla DIRC, were looking forward to a different experience.

The youth group of 61 was made up of 26 males and 35 females representing Sinhala (37), Tamils (18), and Muslims (06) ethnic groups. In addition, 22 members of the Badulla district inter-religious committee comprising Sinhala (15), Tamil (05), and Muslim (02) members enriched the group. Also participating were one Buddhist monk, one Catholic priest, and 2 Catholic nuns. All participants added value to the activity. Furthermore, they did not forget to express their views.





The Covid 19 pandemic confined us to our homes. This is a great opportunity to get out of that monotonous life. Since we made dishes by ourselves, we could share not only our talents but also share our experiences and cultural identity with one another. We were acquainted with peer groups from other communities. I firmly believe that we, as a youth, will be able to change the country for the better which we shall commence from the grassroots level.

S.M. Chamila Dhananjana
Hali-ela

S. Kamaleshvaran
Panwila

The majority that lives in Badulla district are estate workers and they have much less freedom compared to others in the society. This is a great opportunity for them to mingle with outer society. What we should realize is the hidden message given by cooking multi-cultural cuisines. We all need food and nobody can live without food. When we get hungry, we do not categorize food as Sinhala food, Muslim food, etc. Why don't we think similarly in our normal day-to-day lives too. I suppose the time has come for us to think differently and be different.

Coordinator
National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations
Badulla

I am very happy as the coordinator of the Badulla district inter-religious committee because the majority of participants were youth. People who did not join us earlier also took part. They got practical experience with a better understanding of pluralism and reconciliation. The main point is that there was an exchange of cultural dynamics beyond the food-making process. As I believe, these youth will be role models for generations to come.

A.M. Ayisha
Badulupitiya

This is the first time I participated in a program like this. I have never associated with friends of other ethnic communities before. I could talk closely with others and share food with friends in this program. I am really happy about it. And I would like to contribute to similar programs which aim at developing solidarity among communities.

Government officials present identified this activity as a national need. The National Integration Officer of Badulla and the District Coordinator of the National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organizations also participated in this program. They highlighted the need for promoting harmony among communities. Cultural events representing different cultural aspects of the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims were performed. It seemed that at the end of the activity, participating youth realized the value of diversity, even in the food they consumed.

Jaffna District

The third activity in the Youth Food Culture series launched as a counter to islamophobia in Sri Lanka with support from Amnesty International was carried out in the Jaffna district in the Northern Province. Although it can be identified as an area with multicultural aspects, the primary ethnic community living in this area of 570 km is Tamil Hindus. The total population in Jaffna is 583,882 as per the Census of Population and Housing in 2012, of which 98.8% are Sri Lankan Tamils, 0.3% are Indian Tamils while Muslim and Sinhala communities are equal in population at 0.3% each.[1] Accordingly, it is clear that Tamils are the majority in the Jaffna district.

As per their religion, 82.7%, 0.3%, 0.4%, 12.9%, and 3.5% of the total population are Hindus, Buddhists, Islamic, Roman Catholics, and Christians, respectively,[2] which indicates that Hindus are the majority in the Jaffna district.

People of Jaffna are involved in fishing and agriculture as their main sources of income and live amid various social, economic, and political struggles. It is a bitter truth that the people of Jaffna were the victims of brutal terrorism for more than three decades suffer from social and political injustices even today.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Ulundu Vadai"

Ingredients

1kg of Ulundu

250g of big onions

100g of green chilies

2 tsp of fenugreek

Curry leaves - as needed

Salt to taste

1 litre of vegetable oil

Method

Add undu seeds into a bowl and add normal water to cover the seeds. Leave it to soak for about 2 hours (do not exceed the two-hour limit). Rinse and drain off any excess water. After a few minutes, grind the undu seeds. While grinding add some salt and 1/4 cup of water for each undu cup. When it becomes a thick paste, add chopped onions, green chilies and curry leaves to the mixture. Mix everything well and if needed, leave it for fermentation. Heat the oil in a frying pan. Mould the mixture into medium-sized balls and slightly pat on it and make a hole at the centre. Now turn the flame to low and put the Vadai into the heated oil. Flip it from side to side until it turns into a nice golden-brown colour.

History of Ulundu Vadai

When it comes to the history of Ulundu Vadai, there is a belief that this dish appeared in the village of Maddur in the State of Karnataka. This street food snack was made popular in Uduchchi restaurants in Mumbai. This soft lentil fritter has become more popular among South Indians at present. The specialty is that this is bangle-shaped with a hole in the centre which needs to be deep fried. Today, Ulundu Vadai is served as a snack, as an appetizer or even enjoyed at breakfast among Tamils in both India and Sri Lanka. Due to its softness, it is also called Medhu Vadai (soft) in the Kannada language. Ulundu Vadai is in the forefront of the Vadai family. It is also called Udinna Vade, Medhu Vade, Kadjelu (Telugu), Ulundu Vada (Malayalam). Usually, they are served with chutney and sambar and with Idli as breakfast. Many people also eat it with curd. Ulundu Vadai has become a popular and significant food not only among Tamils but also among Sinhalese and Muslims.

"Uludhu Wade" was prepared to represent Tamil culture during the programme held in the Anuradhapura district.

A journey linking the North and South with friendship

The Jaffna district bears scars of a long-protracted war that left its community in tatters. During the war, much of its culture remained hidden, with an occasional glimpse of what it would have been. On the 11th of February 2021, the food culture activity was held in Jaffna to foster inter-community collaboration and to promote the concept of pluralism. This was a different experience because DIRC members from the Southern province also joined us to build a bridge of friendship. That is how it became the cultural bridge connecting the north and south.

Among the 62 youth participants, there were 41 males and 21 females representing the Sinhala (13), Tamil (45), and Muslim (04) communities. Additionally, 16 members from DIRCs participated. These included 11 from Jaffna DIRC and 5 from the Galle DIRC- including 13 males and 3 females. They included 9 Sinhalese, 5 Tamils, and 2 Muslims. Altogether there were 78 participants in this program. Four Buddhist monks, one Catholic priest, and one Hindu kurukkal joined the program to promote religious reconciliation. Participants shared their ideas freely.













It is a slow journey for us to be normalized as we were victims of the war for more than three decades because we are still haunted by these bitter memories. We felt marginalized as a separate community within the words 'communal war'. So, we were desperate about everything. But the journey of reconciliation embedded with the food culture, changed me for good. I believe that it was the same feeling of all the Tamil brothers and sisters who are here. Although we taste the delicacy of Konda Kavum, I was not aware of it being an identity of Sinhala culture. But, knowing it does not make us lose our liking towards this food. It is the same with brotherhood. There is no point in being segregated, but get together in order to develop as one nation, one country.

K. Darulan
Jaffna

As I believe, we, the Sinhala, the Tamils and Muslims are innocent. Politicians who are over-whelmed with power try to keep us separate so that they can establish their power. What a feeling it was to work together irrespective of our religion. This is what should happen in Sri Lanka. We have no grudges towards one another. The only thing we need is to live happily with everyone. It becomes unpalatable if we follow a monotonous food pattern. Similarly it becomes dull if there is no diversity in the community. We should not be divided destroying one another. Let's extend the hand of friendship.

Piyula
Jaffna

As social beings, we humans cannot live segregated. We are connected to one another. I cannot imagine the friendship we built through this program. That bond will never fade away. We need to change our perception of others irrespective of where they come from. We need to share our cultures and this was a great experience. Cuisines that we think are ours, do not belong to us alone. They are part of other cultures too. We should share not only cuisines but also other cultural elements. There is beauty in diversity.

M.M. Mafas
Puttlam

Compared to programs held in other districts, this was different. They were happily involved not only in cooking together but also in serving one another. These youths will never forget the taste and the fragrance of Konda Kavum, Watalappam, and Ulundu Vadai made in Nawakkuli, Jaffna.

Anuradhapura District

The fourth activity in the Youth Food culture series was carried out to address islamophobia among Sri Lankans with support from Amnesty International in the culturally and historically rich Anuradhapura district. The Anuradhapura district is a multi-cultural district with an area of 2,314 km2, and a total population of 860,575 as per the Census of Population and Housing in 2012. Of these 90.9% are Sinhala, 0.5% are Sri Lankan Tamils, 0.1% are Indian Tamils and 8.2% are Muslims.[1] Accordingly, the Sinhalese are the majority community in the Anuradhapura district.

As per their religion, 90%, 0.3%, 8.3%, 0.7%, and 0.4% of the total population are Buddhists, Hindus, Islamic, Roman Catholics, and Christians, respectively,[2] which indicates that Buddhists are the majority in a community in the Anuradhapura district.

Anuradhapura is a unique city located within the cultural triangle in Sri Lanka. Its value lies in a large number of historical and religious monuments which are inherently tied to the identity of the Sinhalese people and Buddhism. Anuradhapura showcases how many different communities have existed together for millennia, adding value to the cultural fibre of this location.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Konda Kavum"

Ingredients

1kg of rice flour

½ a bottle of kithul treacle

Pinch of salt

Fennel powder (if needed)

Sharply pointed skewer or rod

Method

Soak rice overnight and drain excess water. Then grind it into a fine powder. Sift the rice flour several times using a sieve. Dissolve the rice flour with kithul treacle and salt. If the batter is thick, add a little warm water (the thickness of the batter depends on the thickness of treacle). Pour oil into a wok on a flame to deep fry Kavum. Get a spoonful of batter to a ladle and put it in the oil. Let it cook. Halfway, use the wooden skewer and gently press the centre of Kavum. At this time, the uncooked batter will come up in the oil. Using a ladle, pour some batter to the top of the Kavum to shape the top part of it (hair) while turning and lifting the skewer. Let the Kavum fry by gently splashing oil over it. Once it turns golden brown remove from wok and keep it on a tissue paper to drain excess oil. This is the method of preparing this delicacy. To shape the top of the Kavum, both hands need to be carefully used (splashing oil with the right hand and turning wooden skewer with the left hand). Be watchful not to over-burn the Kavum. Add fennel powder to the mixture if desired to make it tastier. It would be really delightful if kithul treacle is used instead of coconut treacle.

History of Konda Kavum

Konda Kavum is a primary requirement on the Sinhala New Year food table. Konda Kavum has obscure beginnings, but a long history. It was widely seen in the Kandyan era. Although sweets were much popular in that era compared to other times, these did not expand speedily because new cuisines became popular with the arrival of the British. However, having said that, Kavum is the most delicious sweet among sweets of the Sinhala. Robert Knox in his book "A Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon" states that "They have several sorts of sweet-meats. One they call Caown. It is like to a fritter made of rice-flour and jaggery. They make them up in little lumps, and lay them up on a leaf, and then press them with their thumbs, and put them into a frying pan, and fry them in coconut oil or butter."

"When the Dutch came first to Sri Lanka, the then king ordered these Caown to be made and sent to them as a royal treat. And they say, the Dutch did so admire them, that they asked if they grew upon trees, not supposing it to be part of an art of man to make such dainties." Thus, it can be understood that Konda Kavum is a sweet with a long history which is popular among every community.

The "Konda Kavum" was also made during the activity held in Badulla and Jaffna districts, as part of Sinhala culture.

Anuradhapura covered in vibrant hues of reconciliation

On 14th February 2021, the Food culture activity took place in the Anuradhapura district. This was Valentine's Day on which most youths celebrate love. Anuradhapura is a sacred city of the Sinhalese and is intrinsically a part of Sinhala culture. Although pluralistic concepts are hidden among the historical ruins, the signs are visible among Sri Lankans. The main purpose of organizing a food culture program in Anuradhapura was to encourage youth to appreciate the diversity in cuisine and through that value diversity among communities.





Among youth participants, there were 34 males and 43 females representing the Sinhala (57), Tamil (10), and Muslim (10) communities totaling 77. In addition, 20 DIRC members including 14 males and 6 females representing the Sinhala (17) and Muslim (3) communities took part. A timely discussion on the concepts of pluralism and reconciliation took place. Furthermore, they did not forget to express their views on the different experiences they had and their views on this program.









No matter what, I did not like cuisines made by Muslims at all. Maybe it was due to deceitful media advertisements that projected stories Halal food and tablets that made people sterile. But here, we all got together and prepared various unique cuisines. Most of the time, they are made with the same ingredients and the same methods are followed. What we should do is to change the way we think. If we look at something in a wrong way, everything seems to be wrong.

Sashith Prabodha
Rajanganaya

Fathima Najuha
Pubudupura

Actually we came here with no particular aim. We thought that this might be a mere cooking program. But we realized later that we have so many things to consider seriously. Although we enjoy foods that belong to different communities, we are not ready to accept the people as they are. We all are human beings. We can all live together irrespective of race and religion. I should get used to and accept this diversity.

M. Sathyakumar
Devanampi-yathissapura

This program is a success. We learned about food culture of diverse communities through this program. We experienced harmony and solidarity. Only if we live in peace and harmony with other communities, we will have a better tomorrow. At the same time, it was the first time I got to know the history of these sweets made at the program. Further, I also learnt the methods of preparing these sweets. I have enjoyed these foods before but had no knowledge of their history. And this is my first experience with all the communities in a program like this.

District Coordinator
Anuradhapura

As the coordinator of the Anuradhapura district, I am really happy to have organized this program. Actually, it is not very simple to gather this number of youth into one place especially at present. But they understood the value of this program and the way we are connected to one another through food culture. That is the theory we should apply in our daily life too.

The Municipal Commissioner and the director of the National Youth Services Council of Anuradhapura also joined. The youth of this country are intelligent. They are not reluctant to go ahead with the correct guidance. All that we think is ours, is not ours alone. If we explore the history, we can understand how it originated. That is what the youth of Anuradhapura district have understood from joining the food culture program. This is a great strength for them as future leaders who can change society.

Matara District

The fifth segment in the series of Youth Food culture activities was carried out in the Matara district. It addressed issues of islamophobia among communities in Sri Lanka with support from Amnesty International. Being a multi-cultural district with an area of 1,282 km^2, the total population of Matara was around 814,048 as per the Census of Population and Housing in 2012, in which 94.2% are Sinhalese, 1.0% are Sri Lankan Tamil, 1.4% are Indian Tamils and 3.1% are Muslims.[1] Accordingly, the Sinhalese are the majority in the Matara district.

As per their religion, 94.1%, 2.0%, 3.1%, 0.2%, and 0.3% of the total population are Buddhists, Hindus, Islamic, Roman Catholics, and Christians, respectively,[2] which indicates that Buddhists are the majority in the Matara district.

Fishing and agriculture are their main livelihoods and have a significant place in Sri Lanka's economy.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Mung Kavum"

Ingredients

100g of rice flour
100g of green gram
250g of sugar
½ bottle of coconut oil
200g of wheat flour
Pinch of turmeric powder
Pinch of cardamom
Salt to taste

Method

Wash and dry green gram and pan fry both green gram and rice flour separately on medium flame. Then, grind green gram well. Mix green gram flour and rice flour together. Add a pinch of chopped cardamom into the mixture. Then, put a pan on the flame and add sugar, ½ a cup of water and pinch of salt. While stirring the sugar syrup, add flour into it and cook until it becomes a thick paste. Then, dust a board with wheat flour and spread the mixture on a board and cut diamond shapes.

In another bowl mix wheat flour, turmeric powder, salt and water to make a thick batter. Meanwhile heat a pot filled with oil. Dip the diamond shaped kavum in the batter, cover with the batter and put them into oil. Fry until golden brown.

History of Mung Kavum

The history of Kavum in our country can be traced far back. People, whether poor or rich, always made milk rice, Kavum and other sweets and purchased new clothes for the Sinhala New Year. It is a custom to share food items among households which encourages good will among people. Sinhala New Year is all about Kavum and other sweets. Even Robert Knox was fascinated and enjoyed the sweets prepared by our ladies. There are women who are experts in making the perfect Kavum and are known as the ‘Kavum mothers’.

There are many types of Kavum in Sinhala society such as Narang Kavum, sugar Kavum, honey Kavum and Mung Kavum. Mung Kavum is special because it is made with green gram flour. Besides, there is a coating made with wheat flour and turmeric powder which adds a yellowish colour to the Mung Kavum. This can be made in different shapes. There are many songs based on Kavum. At the same time, Kavum plays a significant role not only during the Sinhala New Year but also during important celebration of the Sinhala people.

"Gemak"



Method

Make a syrup mixing sugar, cardamom, vanilla with water. Then take another bowl to mix yeast and sugar. Put wheat flour, salt, milk powder into the yeast mixture and mix them adding water as needed until it becomes a smooth dough. Cover it with a lid and keep aside for 30 minutes. Then make small balls as needed.

Put a frying pan on the flame and add oil to heat. Fry Gemak balls in the oil. Then let fried Gemak soak in the sugar syrup for one hour or more to get more sweetness into them and once they are well soaked, take them out and serve. This dish can be preserved for some days which is essential in various festivities in Matara.

Ingredients

1 cup of wheat flour

200 ml of coconut oil

Pinch of cardamom powder

½ tsp of yeast

150g of sugar

2 tsp of milk powder

Vanilla

Food colouring - as needed

Salt to taste

History of Gemak

Although the name of Gemak is not well known to Sri Lankan society, it is enjoyed by many people. This sweet which is much popular among kids, is known as ‘Sillara’ in the Badulla district. It belongs to the family of ‘Murukku’. The only difference is that ‘Murukku’ is spicy and ‘Gemak’ is sweet. Today, Gemak can be made adding different colourings and can be bought in different colours from the market.

Gemak is a sweet frequently made in Matara and being a sweet it may not be very good for those with non-communicable diseases such as diabetes. The origin of Gemak can be traced back to the Middle-East region. It is presumed that this dish travelled to South Asia due to business relationships. Gemak is made as very small balls, and is presently made using a mould.



"Susiyam"

Ingredients

1 cup of green gram (steamed)
¾ cups of Jaggery
½ cups of roasted coconut
Turmeric powder - as needed
Cardamom - as needed
Salt to taste

For the dough

½ a cup of Maida flour/ all-purpose flour
2 cups of rice flour
Turmeric powder - as needed
Water - as needed
Salt to taste

Method

Steam wheat flour for about one hour. Heat another bowl and add jaggery and water to make a mixture. Let it cool down. Put another bowl on the flame to heat green gram. Once it is heated, add roasted coconut, cardamom and jaggery syrup and mix them well to get a thick paste. Let it cool for some time and then make balls as needed. In a bowl combine Maida, rice flour, turmeric powder and pinch of salt. Add water meanwhile to make a thick batter to coat Susiyam. Dip them in the batter well and deep fry until golden brown and crispy. Now, Susiyam is ready to be served. This can be preserved for two to three days in a cool dry place.

History of Susiyam

This is a traditional sweet dish of South India especially in the state of Tamil Nadu which is almost always available during especial occasions. Although the name of Susiyam is not well known in Sri Lankan society, it is popular among Tamils who use this to offer to God. This is known as ‘Narang Guli’ or ‘Mun Guli’ among the Sinhalese while some people call it ‘Narang Kavum’. The traditional Tamil mixture of Susiyam has been subjected to change over time.

Green gram and jaggery are used by Tamils while the Sinhalese use flour and coconut syrup. However, ancestors believed that traditionally made Susiyam is high in quality and nutrition. People also add a pinch of pepper to make it spicy instead of its sugariness. At present Susiyam is made bigger than what it was in the past.

Reconciliation shines bright in Matara

The food culture activity which was held in the North moved to Matara in the South. The activity helped instill the value of pluralism in the hearts of youth. It was the 13th of February 2021. Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim youth came to the Hulandawa Tamil school to experience something different. The youth who attended showed no animosity or racist attitudes as they were still untouched by divisive politics and ethnic marginalization. As a result, it was not difficult to make them understand the pluralistic concept through food culture.

Among the youth joining the program in Matara, there were 36 males and 34 females representing the Sinhala (38), Tamil (22), and Muslim (10) ethnic groups totaling 70 participants. In addition, there were 30 members of the Matara DIRC representing 18 Sinhalese, 5 Tamils, and 7 Muslims (20 males and 10 females) who took part. Altogether there were 100 youth participants and DIRC members. What is more important is that religious leaders including a Buddhist monk, a Catholic priest, a Maulavi, and a Hindu kurukkal also joined the program as teachers of religious reconciliation.













Rashan Pravishka
Welipitiya

We enjoy food every day. But this program made me realize that there is something beyond the concept of food. We usually make Mung Kavum in Sinhala homes for the Sinhala New Year as well as Vesak festival. But I enjoyed Gemak and Susiyam today for the first time. Although these cuisines belong to another community, I feel something common with our own cuisines. Sometimes they are different only by name. similarly, we, as human beings are different only by our names. There is no point in brawling as people who live in one country. There will be no issues if we live together as one without being divided in race and religion.

R. Rajesh Kumar
Pitabeddara

I am Tamil but I am different to others. I would like to know friends from other communities. But unfortunately, most of them rejected me. That is the reason I came here today. I would like to stay at the homes of Sinhala friends just as I stay with my Tamil friends. I also like to enjoy their cuisine too. I got the opportunity to make friends with many Sinhala and Muslim youth in this program. I am so happy about that. There is no racism in me as well as among my family members. We can live happily as one nation in Sri Lanka if we get used to accepting diversity.

A. Asmi Ahmad
Godapitiya

The Muslim community faced various problems recently. It was due to offences committed by a small group. Not all of us are like that. When we walk along the road, people look at us as criminals. We become embarrassed in such situations as young girls. Today, we were guided to acknowledge cuisines of other communities as well as to accept diversity. I would like if Sinhala and Tamil brothers and sisters also join hands with us for that change.

Furthermore, the youth did not forget to express their views on this program. Their words were rich with positive intentions which conveyed that they could change society for the better. 25 Government officials from the Matara district joined the youth to experience this different program.

Batticaloa District

The sixth program in this series was carried out in the Batticaloa district in the Eastern Province with support from Amnesty International. Batticaloa is a district with a Tamil majority and has an area of 2,854 km. The total population in the Batticaloa district is 526,567 as per the Census of Population and Housing in 2012, of which 72.3% are Tamil, 1.2% of Sinhalese, 0.3% Indian Tamil and 25.4% are Muslims.[1] Accordingly, it is clear that Tamils are the majority in the Batticaloa district.

As per their religion, 64.3% are Hindu, 1.1% Buddhist, 25.4% are of Islamic origin among the total population living in Batticaloa while Roman Catholics and Christians make up 4.6% and 4.3% respectively.[2] This indicates that Hindus are the majority in the Batticaloa district.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Kozhukattai"

Ingredients

6 cups of roasted rice flour
1 1/2kg of green gram
4kg of sugar
1kg of palm jaggery
10 of big coconuts
750g of plums
50g of roasted pepper
100g of cumin seeds
250g of sugar candy
Salt to taste

Method

First, mix salt with rice flour and mix with hot water. Add the required amount of water to roasted mung beans, boil them, remove excess water and mix sugar in them. After that add roasted coconut, sugar, and green beans and stir well. Now add sugarcane jaggery, sugar lump, dried plums, and pepper powder, and mix well. Take small lumps of rice flour mixed in this way and thin them into a round shape by hand. After the mixture cools down, make balls and steam them for about 15 minutes.

Kozhukattai is a popular South Indian dumpling made in palaces during the reign of kings 2000 years ago. This was made for every festive occasion in palaces at that time. It is described in history books that this was offered to devotees in Hindu religious places. This dish has become popular in Kattankudi, Akkaraipattu, Eravur, Oddamavadi, Batticaloa and Puttalam where the majority are Islamic.

History of Kozhukattai

Kozhukattai was another favourite sweet of Robert Knox. It was then termed as 'Yak Pet' because it was made with rice flour, coconut and jaggery. Although it was popular in the Kandyan era, it is a rare dish today. These are delicious steamed balls which are made with rice flour, coconut and jaggery. According to Robert Knox, this sweet was termed as 'Yakpet' since it tastes as soft as eating bread with jaggery.

In addition, Kozhukattai is offered to Lord Ganesha, the God of wisdom, who is also known as Ganapathi, Vinayagar, Pillayar. Furthermore, this dish is frequently used in ritual offerings to God Ganesha and during agriculture-based festivals in cities like Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa.

"Aggala"



Method

Soak rice, dry and grind. Then roast the rice. Put a pan on the flame and add kithul treacle and some water to make sugar syrup. Then add sugar, shredded coconut, roasted green gram, rice flour, roasted pepper powder and cumin seeds to the same bowl. Stir the mixture and turn off the flame. After cooling down, make balls and serve.

Traditionally, prior to the development of transportation, Aggala was used as a snack at teatime by devotees who walked to religious places. It had become famous among the Sinhala and Tamils during the reigns of South Indian kings. Today it is served in special festivities by all the Sri Lankans irrespective of their religions.

Ingredients

5 cups of rice flour

5 coconuts

2kg of kithul jaggery

1kg of green gram

1kg of sugar

Roasted pepper powder - as needed

Cumin seeds - as needed

Salt to taste

History of Aggala

Robert Knox in his book states that “There is a sweet called Aggala. These balls are made mixing roasted rice flour and honey with a little pepper, cardamom and cinnamon. They can be preserved for some time.” It is believed that Aggala was commonly used as a snack accompanied by a cup of tea by Indians who walked to distant places for many days irrespective of their social status. It is mentioned about Aggala as ‘aggala komalee na’ in ‘Ganadevi Hella’ which is used by kids who request the power of wisdom from Lord Ganesha. Accordingly, its origins can be traced a long way back. Aggala is popular among all communities today.



"Agar Agar"
(Mosses Aluwa)

Ingredients

10 mosses

2 cups of sugar

150g of milk powder

50g of cashew

½ tsp of cardamom

Colourings - as needed

Salt to taste

Method

Put a bowl on the flame to dissolve Agar Agar with some water and bring it to boil. When it dissolves well, add sugar. Boil it while stirring until it becomes the right consistency. Now add milk powder and water to another bowl and dissolve them. Put milk to Agar Agar mixture and add cashew, cardamom, colouring and salt. Mix them well and keep aside to cool down. Then spread it evenly on a tray or banana leaf to cut into pieces.

Make sure to spread it on the tray just after turning off the flame before it gets firm. If not, it will be difficult to cut them into pieces. Agar Agar, rich in sea proteins, is identified as being nutritious for our immunity system. It can be preserved for some days if kept in a cool dry place.

History of Agar Agar

Agar Agar is a gelatinous substance that is derived from the cell walls of red seaweed. It grows on rocky sea beds. It was identified as a popular dish in India and China. Arabic businessmen who came to India for business purposes are said to have introduced this dish in their own countries and it became a significant dish among the Muslim community. Since it enhances the immunity system, Muslims fed their children with Agar Agar from ancient times. Since sea mosses are rare, sometimes Agar Agar cannot be made.

Later, Agar Agar became essential in events when fasting and Iftar. Further, it is a popular food because it boosts energy and blood count. Muslims who travelled from India brough this to Sri Lanka. It was shared with everyone during special occasions and became popular in every community.

A journey to Batticaloa in search of food that connects us

The Batticaloa district where the majority community is Tamil suffered the ravages of war for nearly three decades. Although it has the Tamil culture at the centre, it is not without other cultural influences. The next stop in the food culture activity that promotes multiculturalism and reconciliation was the Batticaloa district. The prime objective of the youth who gathered at the American Ceylon Mission on 18th March 2021 was to experience a different type of activity. All community members were represented, including the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims.









The youth group of 86 at the Batticaloa food culture activity was made up of 54 males and 32 females representing the Sinhalese (38), Tamils (34), and Muslims (14). Additionally, 26 members of the Batticaloa DIRC also participated. They included 14 Tamils and 12 Muslims (23 males and 03 females). The total participation was 112 youth and DIRC members. This group was enriched with the participation of religious leaders including 4 Catholic priests, a Maulavi, and a Hindu kurukkal. A discussion on pluralism and a presentation of cultural events further enhanced the activity and participants shared their experiences with us as follows:

Batticaloa is a district with a majority of Tamils. So, we rarely eat Sinhala cuisine. Though we have heard about Aggala and enjoyed it, today we learnt how to prepare it. There are some similar sweets in our culture too. Only the ingredients are different. There was a different delight in that difference. And what is more important is to know about the history and its connection between other cultures too. This was a great opportunity to develop unity in the country.

S. Dhananjayan
Batticaloa

D.M. Darshika Kaushalya
Keviliyamaduwa

I am Sinhalese. I was brought up with bitter memories of the war. With those experiences we were afraid to come out to society to have relationships with others. Today is the first time I heard about Kozhukattai and Agar Agar of Tamil and Muslim cultures. They are very delicious. We could have enjoyed them before if we were not hostile towards one another. It is so sad. How many interesting things are hidden in our cultures? That diversity will beautify the whole world.

A. M. Amkar
Kattankudy

We do not care much about others. Schools are even divided as Sinhala schools, Tamil schools and Muslim schools. Therefore, opportunities are less for mingling with one another to have close contacts. They still have the wounds and bitter memories of violence faced by every community. These kinds of programs can heal wounds and lead to solidarity among youth.

District Coordinator
Batticaloa

We were waiting for such a program in Batticaloa. We need to organize such programs to enlighten youth who are fed up with the annoying experiences of the war. This food cultural program is very timely. Here, we discussed not only preparing and enjoying food but also, its history and the way we add this diversity to our lives. This will lead the youth to think and act differently.

Participating youth and officials from the district secretariat requested NPC to organize similar programs in Batticaloa for other groups.

Kegalle District

The seventh activity in the Youth Food culture series was carried out in the Kegalle district with support from Amnesty International to address islamophobia in Sri Lanka. Kegalle district located in the Sabaragamuwa Province is a multi-cultural district with an area of 1,693 km^2 and its total population is 840,648 according to the Census of Population and Housing in 2012, in which 85.4% are Sinhalese, 2.1% are Tamil, 5.2% are Indian Tamil and 7.1% are Muslims.[1] Accordingly, it is clear that the Sinhalese are the majority in the Kegalle district.

As per their religions, 84.4%, 6.4%, 7.2%, 1% and 0.7% of the total population are respectively[2] Buddhists, Hindus, Islamic, Roman Catholics and Christians, and this indicates that the Buddhists are the majority in the Kegalle district.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Idli"

Ingredients

250g of Undu flour
(Urad dal)
500g of white rice
Salt to taste

Method

Soak rice and undu seed separately for about 8 hours. Then, drain water and grind them separately to make flour. Now mix both flour together and add salt to taste. Whisk them well adding water until it becomes a thick consistency. Then leave it closed to ferment for 6 hours.

Grease the Idli stand with oil and take a ladleful of batter and fill the Idli mould. Let these steam for 8-10 minutes. This is a very delicious dish and is popular among all the communities.

History of Idli

Idli, an authentic South Indian dish is an integral part of food consumed by Tamil people. History provides evidence of it having an agricultural heritage. Back then, agriculture-based South Indian villagers fulfilled their food requirement using crops cultivated by themselves. They used to take Idli made with Urad Dal for breakfast and dinner. Tamil women pay special attention to Idli since it can be easily made after grinding urad dal. Among other main dishes of Tamil food culture such as Thosai and Vadai, Idli is much preferred. This versatile dish is eaten with chutney, sambar and chick-pea curry by hard-working farmers as an energy-boost.

"Hendi Kavum"



Method

Heat sugar and kithul treacle for a few minutes to make the caramel and set aside to cool. Meanwhile take a mixing bowl to add rice flour, sifted wheat flour, salt and fennel seeds one at a time. Then gradually add caramel while mixing it with hand. Now gradually add water to make a smooth batter and leave it closed for 5 hours.

Heat some coconut oil in a deep pan. Pour a spoonful of batter into the oil and immediately swirl the oil toward the Kavum using a spoon. Then it will come up puffy in the oil. When the underside of the Kavum turns into a golden-brown colour, turn the other side. It is very important to control the flame while frying. When both sides turn golden brown, take it from the oil. If the batter becomes thick, make sure to add coconut milk.

Ingredients

200g of rice flour

100g of wheat flour (sifted twice)

200ml of kithul treacle

½ fried fennel seeds

100g of sugar

150ml/ 175ml of lukewarm water

Salt to taste

History of Hendi Kavum

This was popular among the Sinhala as an offering to God in the past. Different types of Kavum are prepared in every household before the dawn of the Sinhala New Year. Handi Kavum becomes more significant because it can comparatively be preserved for more days. Different types as Narang Kavum, Seeni Kavum, Pani Kavum, Mung Kavum, etc., have originated based on various ingredients. Another Kavum named Mukudu Kavum is unique to the Walasmulla area.

Even kids who ask God of Ganesh for power of wisdom pray ‘I offer Athirasa and Aggala’. Kavum is mentioned in “Ganadevi Hella” as ‘Mal Kavum Rotyena’. Thus, Handi Kavum which is commonly used in every community at present is proved to have a long history.



"Samosa"

Ingredients (for the filling)

200g of potatoes
100g of big onions
100g of tomatoes
5 cloves of garlic
10 coriander leaves
10 onion leaves
Garam masala - small amount
Turmeric powder- small amount
Mustard- small amount
Mango powder - small amount
Salt to taste

For the dough

3 cups of wheat flour
½ tsp of baking soda
1 tsp of cumin seeds
4 tbsp of vegetable oil
Water - as required
Salt to taste

Method - Samosa dough

Mix all the ingredients to make the dough except water. Gradually add water to make a soft dough. Cover and rest for about one hour to ferment.

Filling

Boil potatoes in water and drain excess water (potatoes should not turn mushy but beautifully cooked). Cool them and then crumble. Heat some oil in a pan and then add cumin seeds and mustard. Then add chopped garlic and big onions. Let them fry until golden brown. Then add tomato slices. After few minutes, add turmeric, chili flakes, garam masala, mango powder and salt to taste and mix them well. Then add crumbled potatoes and chopped coriander leaves and onion leaves. Stir well and after some time, turn off flame and set aside to cool.

How to make Samosa

Knead the dough for 3 to 5 minutes. The dough has to be stiff yet not soft. Divide the dough to equal parts. Oil the rolling board and place the ball. Roll it to an oval-shaped even layer. It has to be slightly thick but not too thin. Cut it in the centre to make two parts. Apply water with your finger over the straight edge. Join the edges to make a cone-shape. Stick the edges well. Fill the cone with the filling and press down a bit with a tiny spoon. Apply water on the edge. Stick the edges to seal well. Then deep fry samosa until golden brown.

Any filling including vegetables, chicken or fish can be made for this to enhance the delicacy. It can be made more or less spicy as per your taste. There are samosa sheets in the market today. Instead of deep frying, they can be baked in a preheated oven (200 ^{0}C/ 400 ^{0}F) for about 20 minutes (brush the edges with egg sap if baking).

We met in Kegalle and indulged in the pleasures of hospitality

As part of the food culture activity, we traveled to the Kegalle district in the culturally rich Sabaragamuwa Province. By now the organizing committee had become experts with the experience gained by working in six districts. But since this was a new experience for youth in Kegalle, the Rajagiriya hotel premises was filled to the brim. A large number of youths representing all ethnic communities- the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims participated.





Among youth who actively participated in the Kegalle program, there were 23 males and 66 females from the Sinhala (44), Tamil (23), and Muslim (22) communities totaling 89 participants. Additionally, 17 government officials representing various district-based government institutions also took part. State officials were impressed by this program ad suggested that this be used as a blueprint to spread the concepts of pluralism and reconciliation throughout the district. Similar to other districts, there were some religious leaders including a Buddhist monk, a Catholic priest, a Maulavi, and a Hindu kurukkal. Their participation added value to the activity and this is how they shared their remarks about the program.









Nilmini Ajantha Kumari
Gonagala South

I feel sad because others who live in Kegalle did not get this great opportunity. They should also be made aware of how-to live-in peace irrespective of our race and religion. Actually this should be taken to the grassroot level. There are bogus clashes created among us by politicians. We can address the wrongs of the past. We should live as one, similar to the way we shared our culinary items with one another and not look at others with hatred. That message can be passed to the society with this program.

K. Nirosha
Yakkella

We do not have problems with cuisine. But recently we happened to mistrust the Muslim community due to the events that took place. But it was falsely created by some extremists to create disharmony among communities. Food is considered sacred and nothing bad will be mixed into the food. We learned our mistakes through this program. We need to change our attitudes first. We can live Happily only then.

Abdul Rasak
Kannaththota

We prepare our own food items at our traditional festivals and special food items are made only on special occasions. Although I have enjoyed Sinhala sweets, I never made them before. And I do not know how to make them. But I learned it today. Now we can make Sinhala food items at our festivities. Diversity at the food table will make it more delightful. The same thing should happen in the society. Society is more beautiful when all the communities live happily with one another.

We believe that the youth who came for the activity left as changed persons having witnessed the diversity that exists among us and this can be used to positively influence change in thinking. The activity in Kegalle was as successful as those held before.

Gampaha District

The final activity in this series supported by Amnesty International to address islamophobia among Sri Lankans carried out in the Gampaha district in the Western Province. Having a multi-cultural setting with an area of 1,387km^2 Gampaha is the second most populous district in Sri Lanka with a total population of 2,304,833 as per the Census of Population and Housing in 2012. Of this, 90.5% are Sinhalese, 3.5% are Tamil, of which 0.3% are Indian Tamils and 4.2% are Muslim.[1] Accordingly, it is clear that the Sinhalese community is the majority in the Gampaha district.

As for religion, 71.2%, 2.2%, 4.8%, 19.4% and 1.9% of the total population are Buddhists, Hindus, Islamic, Roman Catholics, and Christians, respectively,[2] which indicates that Buddhists are the majority in the Gampaha district. In addition, compared to other districts, there are more Roman Catholics in Gampaha.

In Gampaha, for the longest time, multi-ethnic/ religious communities have lived peacefully side by side.

1. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012
2. Source - Census of Population and Housing - 2012



"Rava Kesari"

Ingredients

150g of semolina
200g of sugar
¼ of ghee
50g of kesari powder
25g of cashew nuts
50g of plums
Cardamom food colouring
- as needed
Salt to taste

Method

Put a pan on medium flame and add 2 tbsp of ghee. Fry cashew and plums in ghee until golden brown. Then keep them on a kitchen paper towel. Put 1 tbsp of ghee into the pan again to fry semolina. Stir well to make them combine with ghee. Now take it out of the flame. Boil some water in another pot. Add cardamom and food colouring into boiled water. Gradually add pan fried semolina along with Kesari powder and mix them well. Stir consistently until water is absorbed into semolina completely. Now gradually add sugar and once it becomes solid, add ghee while stirring consistently. The Semolina should be well cooked before adding sugar. Add ½ a cup of sugar as per your taste. Then add fried cashew and plums. Add some ghee to make the mixture non-sticky in the pan. Then take it off the flame. Cut into pieces and serve.

History of Rava Kesari

Rava Kesari is a South Indian dessert which was initially served as it is, without being cut into pieces. But now its shape has been subjected to change into balls or cubes. It is made in various colours such as white, yellow, green, red and orange to make it more attractive at festivities. Most of the time, Rava Kesari is served among loved ones to symbolize significant and cheerful moments in India, which means that the sweets share sweetness and happiness.

"Gulab Jamun"



Method

Put water and sugar in a heated pan to make the sugar syrup. When it starts boiling, add cardamom pods, lime juice, saffron and heat it on low flame for 5 to 7 minutes. When it reaches one string consistency or turns slightly sticky, turn off the flame and add rose water and mix well. Leave it aside. Soak semolina in 1½ tbsp of fresh milk for 10 minutes. Then sift milk powder, wheat flour and baking soda into it. Then add ghee, butter, yoghurt and mix them well. Gradually add milk powder to make the dough and leave it for 30 minutes.

Then grease your palms with ghee and divide mixture into marble sized small portions. Take each portion and make a round-shaped crack free balls from it. Heat ghee or oil in a deep pot on medium flame to deep fry Gulab Jamun until golden brown. Transfer them over to kitchen napkin to absorb excess oil. Then soak them in sugar syrup for at least one hour. Serve by garnishing them with almond or pistachio.

History of Gulab Jamun

Gulab Jamun is a classic Indian sweet. Gulab means rose. Jamun is a kind of berry in India. It is called Gulab Jamun because it is made with rose water and in the shape of a Jamun berry. No Indian festival is complete without this delicious delight. It was introduced to Sri Lanka by Muslim migrants from India. It is significantly popular among the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. This is made during the Ramazan festival. At present, it has become popular in Tamil and Sinhala cultures too.

Ingredients

1 cup of milk powder

1 tbsp of wheat flour

2 ½ tbsp. of semolina

1 tsp of yoghurt

½ tsp of baking soda

Fresh milk - as needed

1 tbsp of butter

1 tbsp of ghee

Pistachio/ Almond slices

For the sugar syrup

2 cups of sugar

2 cups of water

6 crushed cardamom

Pinch of saffron

1 tsp of lime juice

1 tsp of rose essence (rose syrup)



"Aluwa"

Ingredients (for 10 pieces)

1kg of white rice flour
Coconut treacle - 1 bottle
50g of cashew
150g of sugar

Method

First grind the rice to make the flour and roast it under medium heat. Then, boil treacle and sugar in a pan until it forms a thick line. Add split cashew nuts into it and stir well. Now take the pan out of the flame. Keep some amount of flour aside for dusting and coating. Now add flour step by step to make the consistency. Now, take a flat tray and dust some flour and spread the mixture on the tray quickly. Cut into pieces as you wish (square shaped or diagonal shaped) promptly. Finally, spread some treacle on the top and coat Aluwa with flour again to make them firm.

History of Aluwa

There is much folklores related to Aluwa stating that it derived from Aggala. It is because the same mixture is used for both Aluwa and Aggala. Only the shape is different, Aggala is round while Aluwa is flat and square-shaped. According to folklore, Aluwa was placed in a flat dish and cut into pieces and is a special sweet that is consumed, along with Aggala, during pilgrimage to the Sri Pada.

The sweetness of humanity shines in Negombo



The final activity in the youth food culture series with support from Amnesty International was carried out in the city of Negombo in the Gampaha district. The idea to promote the concept of pluralism and reconciliation through the appreciation of the food and culture of different communities was implemented successfully in seven districts while the last of the series was held in the Western Province. This activity was organized by members of the Negombo Local Inter-Religious Committee (LIRC) and had a positive impact on youth who came from all over Negombo to take part in activities that promoted inclusion and reconciliation through the appreciation of diverse cuisine.

The 96 youths who took part in activities in Negombo included 32 males and 64 females representing all ethnic communities in the area. They included 50 Sinhalese, 26 Tamils, and 20 Muslims. In addition, 33 members of the Negombo LIRC including 23 males and 10 females took part. The total group of 129 included multi-ethnic/religious youth and LIRC members. The event was further enhanced by the participation of a Buddhist monk, a Catholic nun, a Catholic priest, 3 Islamic Maulavis, and 2 kurukkals.









District Coordinator
Negombo

Negombo is a multi-cultural city. But there are very few opportunities to build up human relationships due to hectic lifestyle. However, this food cultural program laid the foundation for that purpose. We should try to rebuild the lost humanity and fellowship. Power hungry politicians get benefits out of communal segregation. The process of making quick decisions without reflecting to see if its right or wrong, followed by people towards the Muslim community recently was dangerous. Thus, I believe this program will pave the way for us to think anew.

Hiruni Hewmini
Divulapitiya

This is my first time participating in a program on the food culture of different communities. The lectures given at the program made me realize that we all are connected to one another through our food and culture. This was a different program from what I presumed it to be. I have never tasted or heard the name 'Rava Kesari'. They are very delicious. So, I had several similar experiences in this program. Actually, different cuisines make us more connected to one another.

Fathima Sifna
Theriyamulla

I have friends among all the communities. But I had no knowledge of their cultural norms and customs. I met a Sinhala friend in the program whom I asked the way they celebrate Christmas. She has never met a Muslim before. She asked me about our culture and the reason for wearing the Abaya. So, we shared information about our cultures. What I realized today is that although we get together, we do not make it a point to share about our different customs, festivals, food patterns and even our lifestyles with one another. We do not pay attention to know about other cultures since we know everything about our own culture and that is it. This program encourages us to know what we do not know about the other culture. For instance, I got the opportunity to enjoy cuisine such as Kaju Aluwa and Rava kesari which I have never tasted before.

A huge backlash was created among people towards the Muslim community with the Easter Sunday attack. It was severe in Negombo. All Muslims were not involved in it. But most had to face this backlash. However, this program could bridge the gap in society. No one here behaved with a communal or racist mentality which should be taken seriously into consideration by the society.

V. Therisudan
Canal Street

What began in Moneragala in Sri Lanka's Uva Province and steadily moved across the country to cover seven additional districts to address Islamophobia with support from Amnesty International, ended its initial work in Negombo. However, the positive effects of this activity would be felt across all ethnic and religious groups, especially among the youth who took part.



Recipes for Reconciliation

Recipes for Reconciliation





The National Peace Council was established in 1995 by an inter religious group of civil society leaders during the height of Sri Lanka's internal war to promote a peaceful end to the conflict.

The mission of the organization was, and remains, to engage in public education and advocacy so that solutions that are fair and just by all ethnic and religious communities may be found with people's participation.

Today NPC works in partnership with different groups including religious clergy, community leaders, government officials, women and youth and students to educate, mobilise and advocate for a peaceful and just political culture in which there will be equal opportunities for all.

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