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# Culinary

## Entrepreneurs

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A Magazine for the food, hospitality  
and tourism entrepreneurs by



Japan's Iron Chef

**THE KAYASTHA  
TABLE**

The Himachali Food  
Specialist

**THE SANTAL  
TRIBAL CHEF**

The Laotian  
Restaurateur

The Sri Lankan  
Author

**RECIPES FROM  
GUJARAT**

**Ethnic Chefs**

*Special*  
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The Sri Lankan Culinary Ambassador

Chef Masaharu Morimoto popularises Japanese cuisine globally by blending Japanese tradition with Western techniques and local flavours, his influential Iron Chef TV appearances that made him a household name, and making traditional dishes accessible with innovative creations.

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Chef Jeff (Jeff Chanchaleune) is renowned for bringing authentic Laotian flavors to the spotlight with his acclaimed restaurants in America.

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Hailing from Mumbai, Chef Prerana Bandal has explored cuisines of Himachal and Ladakh. She is one of the new age chefs showcasing Himalayan cuisines with passion and creativity.

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Chef Madhusmita Soren is a celebrated culinary and cultural ambassador, who is popularising her Santhali tribal heritage. She is dedicated to preserving, reviving, and globalising the rich traditions of tribal cuisine.

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# *Editorial*

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In this edition, we interview chefs who are promoting ethnic food traditions of various regions and communities.

We begin with Chef Masaharu Morimoto, the celebrated Japanese master who combines Japanese techniques with regional ingredients. We also feature Chef Jeff Chanchaleune, a leading voice for Laotian cuisine best known for bringing Laos into the mainstream American culinary landscape.

Chef Chetna Srivastava highlights the rich, robust culinary traditions of the Kayastha community shaped by its historic roles in administration and culture during the Mughal and British eras. Chef Madhusmita Soren Murmu champions the rustic, soulful foods of the tribal people of India, famous for sharing indigenous techniques, ingredients, recipes and stories of the Santal tribes. Nitika Kuthiala, a passionate home chef and curator of regional Himalayan cuisine, promotes the culinary legacy of Himachal Pradesh, with special focus on the Sood community of the Kangra region.

Tasha Marikkar's *JayaFlava* is a culinary book that encompasses a delightful blend of Sri Lankan flavours from different ethnic communities and regions of the island country.

This edition also features recipes from Chef Anal Kotak, the acclaimed chef, TV host, and food entrepreneur from Gujarat.



**Anil Mulchandani**

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**Masaharu Morimoto**

is known as an Iron Chef on the Japanese TV cooking show Iron Chef and its spinoff Iron Chef America. He is also known for his unique style of presenting Japanese food.

Anil Mulchandani spoke to him.

# JAPAN'S IRON CHEF

### What are your early memories of learning and practicing Japanese food?

When I was growing up in Hiroshima, I always watched my mother cook. They were simple meals but it always inspired me. I later started to work in sushi kitchens and I learned how to make sushi rice, clean the fish, and I would watch the chefs very closely. Japanese cooking taught me patience, respect, and how to let the ingredients speak.

### What inspired you to move to the Western World and create your fusion food?

When I came to America, I wanted to show people the beauty of Japanese food, but I also wanted to learn. I saw so many different ingredients, techniques, and cultures. It was very exciting and gave me new ideas. Fusion was not a plan, it just happened naturally. I respect tradition, but I also like to create something new that connects East and West. Also, being on Iron Chef helped me share my passion with a bigger audience around the world

### What led you to start Morimoto?

I started Morimoto because I wanted a place where I could share my vision of Japanese food without limits. After years of training and working around the world, I wanted to create a restaurant that blends tradition with innovation. Morimoto is my way to bring people new experiences while respecting the heart of Japanese cuisine.

### What is the USP of Morimoto?

I bring authentic Japanese techniques together with creative flavors from many cultures. We focus on using the best ingredients and presenting each dish beautifully to create a special experience. It is a balance between tradition and new ideas, always with respect for the food and the people.

### Which are the top dishes of Morimoto, and why are they your signatures?

Tuna pizza, sticky ribs, tonkatsu and sushi like aburi salmon rolls, surf and turf rolls, and Japanese A5 wagyu are dishes that guests love. These dishes blend Japanese tradition with creative flavors and high-quality ingredients.



**Did you face any challenges starting restaurants that offer Japanese food for the American palate?**

Yes, there were challenges because American tastes are different, and some ingredients were new to people. I learned to balance tradition with flavours that guests enjoy, without losing the essence of Japanese food. Listening to feedback and being open helped me create dishes that connect with both Japanese culture and American guests.

**How did you design and develop the Japanese-American fusion menu of MM by Morimoto? What are the specialties of this concept?**

At MM by Morimoto in Montclair, I wanted to create something new and exciting that reflects both Japanese tradition and American culture. The menu was created to highlight fresh flavors using high-quality ingredients, combining classic Japanese techniques and my take on the classic chophouse. What makes this so special is its focus on bringing people together through food that is both familiar and surprising. We call it the Surf and Turf experience!

**How did you develop Wasabi in India, the country's most known Japanese restaurant?**

When I opened Wasabi in India, I wanted to bring real Japanese flavors but also respect what people in India like to eat. It wasn't always easy because Indian flavours are very different, so I had to find a good balance. Using fresh local ingredients and changing some dishes helped make food people enjoy while keeping true to Japanese cooking. I really love how Wasabi connects people and brings together two amazing cultures.

**Which achievements are you most proud of?**

It's hard to pick just one achievement because I am proud of so many things, especially all the restaurants I have opened around the world. Being on Iron

Chef was very important. It helped me share my cooking with people everywhere. More recently, having my own show on Roku called Sushi Master is exciting because I can teach and inspire in a new way. And I am honored to be Holland America Line's Fresh Fish Ambassador, promoting fresh seafood to travellers around the globe.

**What are your plans for the future?**

In the future, I want to keep sharing happiness through my food. I am excited to see what new challenges and surprises come my way, sometimes even surprising myself. For me, cooking is a journey, and I want to keep exploring and bringing fresh ideas to the table.



# The Laotian Restaurateur

Photos Quit Nguyen



Chef Jeff Chanchaleune, a 2023 & 2024 James Beard Foundation finalist, has started restaurants with Lao cuisine, the food of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (LPDR) in Southeast Asia.. He spoke to Anil Mulchandani about his food at Ma Der! (ma-derr), his restaurant named for a Laotian phrase that basically means "come eat!" or "come thru!".

### **What inspired the start of Ma Der! In Oklahoma?**

I had been cooking Japanese cuisine for 20+ years before realizing that it was time to go back to my roots and cook the food of my culture. I wanted to do this because I've seen over the years that Lao cuisine and culture are almost non-existent. Everyone knows cuisines from Japan, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, and a couple of other East Asian countries. I wanted to help shine a little more light on Laos. Because 9.5 out of 10 people I encountered didn't know anything about Laos.

### **Did you face any challenges starting the Lao restaurant? If yes, how did you overcome them?**



I faced many challenges. We opened about a year and half after COVID hit the U.S. on September 29th, 2021. People were still masked up and being as sanitized as possible. A lot of people were still slowly coming out in public. The biggest challenge was getting Oklahomans to eat a cuisine they've never heard of and to eat it with their hands.

Laotian food is unapologetic, so our flavours are very bold, spicy, funky, and herbaceous. Those flavours together is a rare find in Oklahoma. I believe in what I am doing, but educating the staff and our diners was very crucial in our success. My team had to buy in and it was up to me to share my culture as much as I could through history and cuisine.

### **What are the special features of the restaurant and its food?**

As I mentioned above, our food is spicy, funky, and apologetic. Our restaurant is one of few restaurants around the country that is doing Laotian food on a full scale, meaning a full beverage program and offering as many Laotian dishes as possible. Laotian food has always been grouped into



Thai cuisine, but we have our own story and some of it influenced some very popular mainstream Thai dishes.

### **What are the specialities of Lao cuisine, which make it distinct from the cuisines of neighbouring countries?**

Lao people love sticky rice and laab, a minced meat salad that can



be made with chicken, pork, beef, shrimp, etc. It originated in Laos and is one of those dishes that were made popular in Thailand. We make mok paa, which is a catfish dish that is steamed in banana leaves with dill, kaffir, galangal, garlic, and chile peppers. We are also known for sai oua, a spicy and herbaceous pork sausage, and jaews, chili dips that can be made with just about anything. The base ingredients are roasted Thai chili peppers. Garlic, shallots, and two types of fish sauce. We are most similar to Thailand as you will find in the history books. We do have some similarities to Vietnamese food as well. We eat more salty, funky, and spicy than sweet.

**What are your top dishes?**

My favorite dish to eat and make is a Laotian chicken noodle soup called Khao Piek Sen. The restaurant's signature dish is our nam khao - a crispy rice salad with fermented pork, herbs, peanuts, lime, and fish sauce. Our Chuen Gai - twice-fried chicken wings with a galangal red curry glaze and fried shallots is our second most popular dish.

**What are the highlights of your culinary journey?**

I cooked Japanese food for 20+ years before realizing it was finally time to go back to my roots and cook Laotian food. It was the turning point of my career where I found my calling. It led to top 50 lists on Bon Appétit, the New York Times, USA Today, and two finalist nominations for a James Beard Award. I now have a second Laotian restaurant serving Laotian

chicken noodle soup and other noodle dishes.



**What are your future aspirations?**

I hope to open one more restaurant inspired by my travels, where I've worked, and what I like to eat. I want to eventually go slow from opening my own restaurants and travel the world to eat through as many cultures as possible.

**What do you think should be done by the government and the industries to promote Laos gastronomy on a global scale?**

I think more support and awareness for the country, culture, and food. I think we need more people with a platform to finally pay attention and make the effort to learn/research about Laos and other underrepresented countries.



**Nam Khao (Crispy Rice Salad)**

This salad is the best-selling dish at Ma Der Lao Kitchen, an Oklahoma City Lao restaurant that chef Jeff Chanchaleune opened with his sister Jeslyn to pay homage to their family's heritage.

**Ingredients**

**For The Rice Cakes**

- 1½ cups jasmine rice (see note)

- ½ cups coconut milk
- 2 tbsp. fish sauce
- 2 tbsp. oyster sauce
- 1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tsp. Thai red curry paste, such as Mae Ploy
- 1 large egg
- Vegetable oil, for frying



**FOR THE SALAD:**

- 5 whole dried Thai chiles (see note), or other medium-hot chiles such as árbol
- ¼ cups fresh lime juice
- 2 tbsp. fish sauce
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. ground Thai chiles, or crushed red chile flakes (see note)
- 10 oz. cup naem (Thai pork sausage), coarsely chopped (1 cup)
- 1 cup roasted unsalted peanuts, coarsely chopped
- ½ cups coarsely chopped cilantro
- ½ cups coarsely chopped mint leaves
- 3 medium scallions, dark green tops discarded, coarsely chopped (½ cup)
- 1 small head red leaf lettuce, cleaned, leaves torn off

**Instructions**

**STEP 1**

Make the rice cakes: In a fine-mesh strainer, rinse the rice until the water runs clear, then set aside for 5 minutes to drain. Transfer the rice to a pot, pour in 2 cups of water, and turn the heat to high. When the water boils, stir once,

then turn the heat to low, cover, and cook for 15 minutes. Without opening the lid, remove from the heat and let sit for 10 minutes to steam. (Alternatively, cook the rice in a rice cooker according to the manufacturer’s instructions.) Use a fork to fluff the rice, then set aside uncovered until cooled to room temperature, about 30 minutes.

**STEP 2**

In a large bowl, whisk together the coconut milk, fish sauce, oyster sauce, black pepper, curry paste, and egg. Add the rice and use your hands to combine. Using wet hands, form ½ cup of the rice mixture into a puck-shaped cake measuring about 3 inches in diameter and 1 inch thick. Transfer to a plate and repeat with the remaining rice.

**STEP 3**

Into a large pot set over medium-high heat, pour the oil to a depth of 2 inches and attach a deep-fry thermometer. When the temperature reads 350°F, add enough rice cakes to fill the pan

without overcrowding and fry, turning once, until crisp and golden, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate and repeat with the remaining rice cakes. Do not remove from the heat.

**STEP 4**

Make the salad: To the pot, add the whole chiles and fry until beginning to brown, about 30 seconds. Transfer to the plate with the rice cakes and turn off the heat.

**STEP 5**

In a large bowl, stir together the lime juice, fish sauce, salt, sugar, and ground chiles. Tear the rice pucks into bite-size pieces and add to the lime juice mixture, then add the naem, peanuts, cilantro, mint, and scallions and toss to combine.

**STEP 6**

To serve, cover half of a platter with the lettuce leaves, then scrape the nam khao onto the other half. Sprinkle with the fried chiles and serve.

# THE CHEF IN THE HIMALAYA



**Prerana Bandal**, after her education in Mumbai and working in 5-star hotels of Mumbai and Delhi, moved north to Kausali and now Ladakh. She talks about her experiences with Himalayan and Trans-Himalayan cuisines.

### **What inspired you to take up a culinary career?**

I grew up surrounded by people who loved food—cooking, eating, farming, and preserving. My mom and grandmother were my biggest influences. They taught me the value of food, the importance of respecting what's on your plate, and the hard work and intention that go into producing a good meal. Though I initially wanted to become a commercial pilot, I slowly realised how much I enjoyed cooking, and how natural it felt. That love eventually turned into a desire to pursue it professionally. It wasn't a decision made overnight, but when it clicked, I knew this was what I wanted to do, as it brings me immense joy and satisfaction

### **What are the highlights of your culinary career?**

The real highlights have been the people I've worked with—the mentors who guided me, and the teams that shaped me. Starting as a commis at The Oberoi, Nariman Point, Mumbai, I was lucky to learn the discipline, rigor, and fundamentals of working in a professional kitchen. These early experiences built a strong foundation that



continues to shape how I approach food, teamwork, and growth in the kitchen.

### **During your work as the head chef of Amaya, Darwa, what were your top discoveries in ingredients and dishes of Himachal Pradesh?**

My time in Kasauli was about starting fresh—with no preconceived menu, just a desire to understand the land, its produce, and people. Coming from Mumbai, I had to unlearn many things and reconnect with the simplicity of good ingredients. The mountain life teaches you to slow down and appreciate the moment, and this philosophy is mirrored in how people use their produce. Every stage of a crop is valued—like the

kachnar buds that become chutney or pickles, or wild berries like hisalu and ankhe that make forest walks an adventure.

Some of my favourite projects included fermenting pine cones with jaggery to create pine honey, curing local trout, making furikake from trout bones, and exploring chooch (wild watercress). These discoveries inspired the creation of the Lab Kitchen—a space dedicated to showcasing indigenous ingredients with the respect and creativity they deserve.

### **What are your exciting discoveries in Ladakh?**

Ladakh's food culture is deeply rooted in necessity and ingenuity.

The practice of nose-to-tail cooking and preserving produce for harsh winters is both resourceful and deeply flavourful.

The short summer brings an explosion of trans-Himalayan produce, which is often dried, pickled, or preserved. These preservation methods intensify flavour—dried vegetables rehydrated in broths become umami-rich and complex. The simplicity of the cooking is deceptive; there's deep knowledge behind it. The whole cycle, from seed to storage, reveals the layered, intelligent approach Ladakhis have to food. **Though Ladakh has its own dishes, people**

**often associate Tibetan or Kashmiri food with Ladakhi cuisine. Which dishes do you consider most symbolic of**

**Ladakhi cuisine?** Ladakhi cuisine is a beautiful blend shaped by geography, history, and trade—especially its location along the ancient Silk Route. While influences from Tibet and Kashmir are evident, Ladakh's food is uniquely its own. For me, the most symbolic meal would be khambir (a sourdough bread made from local wheat), served with khakla (local butter) and gur-gur cha (butter tea). These staples reflect the climate, the agricultural practices, and the resilience of the people. The use of wild foraged

ingredients also defines Ladakhi food—it's humble yet rooted in deep knowledge of the land.

**What should be done to promote regional and micro-regional cuisines like Ladakhi that are not well known?**

First, people need to respect what's growing in their own regions instead of chasing trends. Eating seasonally and locally isn't just sustainable—it's healthier and more flavorful. Travelers should also take the time to understand and appreciate the local food when visiting such regions. Chefs, restaurants, and media have a role to play in showcasing these cuisines without diluting their



essence. We need more storytelling, more respect for authenticity, and better platforms for local voices.

**How can Ladakhi and Himachali ingredients and foods be promoted to benefit the local farmers and pastoral communities of the Himalayas and cold desert regions?**

The beauty of these regions lies in their purity of produce and traditional methods. However, many farmers struggle to access platforms where their work is valued. To bridge this gap, we need to support digital marketing, build cooperative models, and develop online sales channels that allow these communities to reach larger audiences. As someone who has worked closely with farmers, I've seen how transformative a respectful platform can be—where produce isn't just sold but celebrated.

**What are your future aspirations as a chef?**

Cooking in the mountains has been one of the most enriching experiences of my life. I have

learned more from the people, the terrain, and the traditions than I ever imagined. My aspiration is to continue telling the story of Himalayan life through food—its resilience, its intelligence, and

its quiet beauty. I want to create spaces and menus that reflect the rhythm of mountain life, and in doing so, give voice to the culture and people who inspire me every day





**Nitika Kuthiala** is the founder of Pahadi Pattal, an initiative to bring Himachal's cuisines to the forefront.

# THE HIMACHALI FOOD PROMOTER

### What inspired you to start Pahadi Pattal?

I moved to Noida and realized that even in Himachal, people barely knew the full depth of their own cuisine. Most menus were reduced to Maggi, tea and momo. Restaurants cater to tourist cravings, not regional depth. That stung. I grew up eating dishes that carried stories, seasons, and rituals. So I started Pahadi Pattal to correct the narrative, one plate at a time. It began with a humble Sood Panjiri, an heirloom recipe and the response was overwhelming. That gave me the push to go deeper.

### What are the special features of Himachal's food?

Himachali food isn't flashy it's slow-cooked, seasonal, and deeply local. Many dishes are vegetarian, cooked without onion or garlic, which confuses people used to spice-heavy fare. Also, the idea of eating at home-run popups was new. But once people taste the food and hear the stories, they get it.

### Which are the micro-regional and community-specific cuisines of Himachal that you recommend?

- **Kangra:** Home to aloo-chana

madra, mahni, and siddu, the flavors are mellow, curd-based, and deeply comforting.

- **Spiti:** Influenced by Tibetan food, think thukpa, skyur, and barley-based dishes. Minimal spices, high-altitude ingredients.
- **Kinnaur:** Rich in buckwheat, apricots, and meats. Siddu, meat and opla ki roti are standouts. The food is earthy and robust.
- **Sood community:** Soodi Dham, royal and dry fruit rich dishes, bhaturu (leaven bread). These

are celebratory, nutrient-rich dishes.

- **Gaddi tribe:** their food includes milk, milk products, agriculture produce and non veg.
- **Kinnauris:** Use apricot oil, buckwheat, and fermented foods in everyday cooking.

Each valley has its own rhythm, its own pantry.

Himachal Pradesh has a rich repertoire of traditional breads such as siddu (stuffed steamed



bread), bhaturu (local sourdough flatbread using Malera culture), and pakain (deep-fried festive flatbread).

**Which are your top dishes?**

I have travelled across Himachal and tasted food from almost every region. That's why my menu brings together flavours from all over the state. You'll find different kinds of dals, seasonal vegetables, breads, non-veg dishes, and even food made for festivals and religious occasions. It's all there each dish with its own story and local touch.

**Dal Panjiri:** My first offering. It's nostalgic, nutritious, and rooted in

my family's kitchen.

**Dham:** Dham is a ceremonial feast of Himachal. "Boti" is a traditional, often Brahmin, chef who specializes in preparing the ceremonial Dham, a slow-cooked feast served on special occasions

like festivals and weddings. I am known as first female Boti of the Himachal.

**Breads Of Himachal:** Siddu, Babru, Childu, Patande, Bhaturu, Kachori Makki ki roti, bedua roti, lushke



**Non Vegetarian dishes:** Chaa meat, khatta meat, mora meat, dadu meat, etc.

These dishes speak of home, ritual, and resilience.

**What are the highlights of your journey?**

I started Pahadi Pattal to make people truly see and taste what Himachali cuisine is all about.

Today, many know my food and the stories behind it. I've collaborated

with some of India's top hospitality brands, and shared insights with national and international media to spotlight our regional dishes. All of this naturally led me deeper into research and documentation uncovering forgotten recipes, rituals, and food memories. I'm still at it, doing my bit to keep the tradition alive and evolving.

**What are your future aspirations as a Himachali chef?**

I want to document Himachali food in a way that's accessible and emotional. I want to collaborate with properties who want to showcase flavours of Himachal Pradesh. A book, maybe. More popups across India. Collaborations with chefs who value authenticity. And eventually, a space that's part kitchen, part archive, part storytelling lab.





Chetna  
Srivastava

# Kaayastha Table

Kaayastha Table is my heartfelt attempt to revive and celebrate the food traditions of the Kayastha community: a cuisine that is elegant, layered, and deeply personal. Growing up in a home where the kitchen was the heart of the house, I was shaped by the flavours and aromas of my parents' cooking. My mother's delicate vegetarian spreads and my father's slow-cooked mutton gravies were not just meals, they were celebrations of culture, memory, and togetherness.

Over the years, I realised many of these recipes were slowly disappearing, even from Kayastha homes. That became my calling .. to research, document, test, and serve these dishes, so they live on for future generations. Kaayastha Table is both a dining experience and a cultural archive, a place where stories and recipes sit side by side, reminding us of who we are and where we come from.

## The inspiration

My parents were my first culinary inspiration. My mother created the most **delicate vegetarian spreads**, filled with seasonal vegetables, stuffed gourds, fragrant dals, and gently spiced curries. My father was the **master of mutton**, slow-cooking it to perfection till it melted in the mouth, filling the house with aromas that made neighbours drop by unannounced. For me, food was never just food .. it was the language of love, memory, and culture. Over the years, I saw many of these dishes disappear from everyday cooking, even in Kayastha homes.

**Kaayastha Table** is my way of honouring my parents and preserving the recipes and memories they passed down, so future generations can experience the richness of this culinary legacy.

## The cuisine of the Kayasthas

Kayasthas are wonderfully diverse, stretching across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Bengal. While my culinary roots lie around the **Lucknow, Allahabad,**

## Varanasi and Delhi Kayastha

**traditions**, I consciously include recipes from other sub-groups as well. The goal is to create a **shared table** that celebrates the whole spectrum of Kayastha cooking — from the robust meat gravies of UP to the subtle vegetarian fare of Bihar and Bengal — showing how each region has shaped the cuisine.

Kayastha cuisine is known for its **graceful simplicity and thoughtful spicing** — taking humble ingredients and transforming them into rich, flavourful dishes. It balances vegetarian and non-vegetarian fare beautifully and celebrates both daily meals and grand feasts.

## Signature dishes include:

- **Karail** – white-lentil gravy with spiced fritters.
- **Subziyon ka Bharwaan** – stuffed vegetables with panch phoron and fennel.
- **Kaayasthana Gosht** – slow-cooked mutton in minimal spices.

- **Chicken Kofta** – minced chicken dumplings cooked gently in gravy.
- **Makhane ki Kheer** – creamy foxnut pudding.
- **Khus-khus ki Subzi** – delicate poppy-seed curry.
- **Rasajein** – gram-flour gravy subzi.
- **Mirch ka Koota** – green chillies in tangy achaari masala.

*And there are many more — each dish carries with it a story, a memory, and a piece of our identity. Slow cooking, lesser or no use of tomatoes in most of the dishes, freshly ground spices form the ethos of delectable kayastha cuisine.*

## Research and writing

Regional and micro-regional Indian cuisines have finally begun to receive the attention they deserve, thanks to food writers, chefs, and cultural historians. My work builds



on this wave but focuses on **storytelling and memory**. My upcoming book combines memoir, cultural essays, and recipes, giving readers a glimpse into the life, festivals, and kitchen rituals of the Kayastha community. Through **food conversations, and social media content**, I try to bring Kayastha

cuisine into mainstream awareness.

I see each recipe as a story waiting to be told. I collect them from **family elders, old handwritten diaries, Kayastha social groups, and through interviews with those who have lived these traditions**. I

actively invite recipes on social media, encouraging the community to share their heirloom dishes, festive favourites, and rare finds. Each recipe is **researched thoroughly**, and I discuss ingredients, proportions, and cooking techniques with multiple sources. Then I test them in my

own kitchen, tweaking them until they are true to tradition yet practical for a modern cook.

Finally, I share them with a **small tasting circle** of family, friends, and food lovers, incorporating their feedback before I document them with the **story or ritual that goes with the dish**.

### Curating dining experiences

Through **Kaayastha Table**, I create

### immersive home-dining

**Experiences** where guests can enjoy a curated menu and hear the stories behind each dish. I also plan to host **seasonal pop-ups, collaborate with cultural experts, and share recipes, trivia, and food memories online**. By inviting families to share their heirloom recipes, I aim to build a **community-driven culinary archive** for future generations.

### Aspirations

I dream of building a **culinary studio and cultural archive** where workshops, cooking classes, and curated meals bring Kayastha cuisine to life. I am currently working on a **coffee-table book** that combines recipes with memoirs and oral histories. In the future, I hope to take **Kaayastha Table beyond my city**, curating pop-ups across India and internationally, so this cuisine travels to newer audiences and gets the recognition it deserves.

### The way forward for micro-regional cuisines

Communities must **document and share their recipes generously** and involve younger generations in cooking them. Government authorities can support **culinary festivals, heritage food trails, and recipe archives**. The food industry can integrate these micro-regional dishes into restaurant menus and chef training programmes. Together, we can ensure these food traditions don't just survive, but **become part of India's living, evolving culinary map**.



# THE CHAMPION OF TRIBAL CUISINES



## **Chef Madhusmita Soren Murmu on the Rise of Santali Food**

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The Santal (Santhal) community is the largest Adivasi group in Jharkhand and West Bengal, with a presence in Odisha, Bihar, Assam, and Tripura. Among them, Chef Madhusmita Soren Murmu stands out as a cultural ambassador, working passionately to bring Santali food—and tribal cuisines at large—into India's culinary mainstream.

## The Roots

Some of my earliest memories are of woodsmoke drifting from the chulha, rice steamed in sal leaf bowls, and fish roasted in banana leaves. During festivals such as Baha Bonga and Sohrai, the home came alive with music, laughter and the aroma of handia, roasted roots, and seasonal greens.

***“As a child, I thought these were just dishes. Only later did I realize they were stories—of our land, forests, and way of life.”***

That realization sparked my journey. I saw how deeply Santali cuisine was connected to the seasons, the forest, and community rituals—yet very few outside the tribe knew of its richness. As I entered the culinary world, I made it her mission to preserve out ancestral knowledge and share it with wider audiences.

***“Each time I recreate a Santali dish, I feel I’m keeping a piece of our culture alive.”***

## The Challenges

***When I began, tribal cuisine was often dismissed as “too simple” or “too rustic.”***

Sourcing indigenous ingredients, creating awareness, and convincing people to taste the dishes were significant challenges.

To change perceptions, I began sharing stories behind the food—how each dish connects to forest ecology, spiritual beliefs, and community life. Slowly, audiences opened up. Through food festivals, workshops, and hotel collaborations, I established Santali food as a cuisine of depth, Sustainability, and heritage.

***“Today, when people recognize Santali dishes, it feels like a victory for my entire community.”***



## The Santali Approach to Food

Santali cooking is rooted in simplicity, seasonality and respect for nature.

The cuisine reflects a minimalistic philosophy—nothing is wasted; ingredients are foraged, grown locally or sourced sustainably.

Core elements include:

- Fresh greens, roots & forest mushrooms
- Millets
- River fish & crustaceans
- Bamboo shoots
- Fermentation, roasting & steaming
- Minimal oil and spices; woodfire cooking

While regional variations exist—Odisha cuisine leans on leafy greens and river fish, Jharkhand and Bengal use snails, crab, and more fermentation—the soul of the food remains constant: harmony between people, nature and tradition.

## Notable Santali Dishes

- **Daka** – A nourishing mixed-vegetable stew, sometimes with

meat/fish

- **Rugu Chaatu** – Wild mushroom curry, prepared during monsoon
- **Handia** – Traditional fermented rice beer for rituals
- **Sanai Pitha** – Steamed rice cakes, sometimes filled with coconut or jaggery
- **Baha Khichdi** – Festive rice-lentil dish, flavored with forest herbs
- **Kudrum Chutney** – Fiery chutney made from red ants and eggs
- **Kodo / Mandua Roti** – Millet flatbreads
- **Karmi Saag Bhaja** – Stir-fried medicinal greens
- **Dhuska**, Khapra Roti, Soley, Leto, Hao Chutney
- **Pakhala (Water Rice)** – Fermented rice eaten with salt and green chillies

### Championing Tribal Cuisine

A defining moment in my journey was MasterChef India Season 8, where I represented indigenous food traditions on national television. Reaching the Top 22 was a personal milestone—and symbolic recognition for tribal cuisine.

Her dream initiative, the Santali

Food Festival, brought tribal dishes to a mainstream hotel audience for the first time. Watching guests relish unfamiliar dishes with deep appreciation was profoundly transformative.

Collaborations with renowned hospitality groups—including Taj Hotels, Ginger, and others—further helped present tribal cuisine in refined formats without compromising authenticity.

With support from the Tata Steel Foundation, IHM, and other institutions, I led workshops and demonstrations, inspiring both

students and communities. I also document recipes from village elders to prevent the loss of culinary heritage.





depends on both governmental support and community participation.

**The Government can:**

- Document and promote indigenous food through tourism & festivals
- Support community-based food hubs
- Fund farmers, foragers & women-led enterprises
- Include tribal cuisines in school meals & hospitality curricula

**Communities can:**

- Record and preserve traditional recipes
- Encourage youth to innovate responsibly
- Celebrate local produce & culinary identity

**The Ingredient Challenge**

Many core ingredients—wild greens, forest mushrooms, bamboo shoots, local millets—are seasonal and available only in specific forest regions. To ensure authenticity, she partners with:

- Local farmers
- Women’s self-help groups
- Foragers

When sourcing is difficult, she

explores suitable seasonal alternatives while preserving the spirit of the dish.

***“Preserving tribal cuisine also means protecting the biodiversity and communities that sustain it.”***

**What Needs to be Done**

Micro-cuisines—regional, tribal, and community-based—are living cultural archives. Their future

Promoting tribal cuisine is not just cultural preservation—it is livelihood creation. It supports farmers, foragers, potters, and women-led microbusinesses, strengthening rural economies and fostering sustainable agriculture.

**“Through food, cultural heritage transforms into economic opportunity.”**

# CHEF'S SPECIALS

FROM GUJARAT



**Chef**

**Aanal Kotak**

Aanal Kotak qualified as a fashion designer but decided to follow her dream of becoming a chef and restaurateur. Today, she is known as a chef and the host of TV shows. As a food entrepreneur, she has multiple restaurants in India and abroad, as well as a manufacturing unit for spice mixes. These are some of her recipes.

## PIZZA MATHRI

CHEF AANAL KOTAK

PREP TIME: 20 MINUTES

COOK TIME: 15-20 MINUTES

TOTAL TIME: 35-40 MINUTES



### INGREDIENTS:

- 1 Cup Maida (All-Purpose Flour)
- 1/4 Cup Rava (Semolina)
- 1 Tbsp Chilli Flakes
- 1 Tsp Mixed Herbs
- 1 Tsp Oregano
- Salt To Taste
- 2 Tbsp Oil
- 2 Tbsp Tomato Ketchup
- Water As Required
- Oil For Frying

### METHOD:

- **Prepare Dough:** In a mixing bowl, combine maida, rava, chili flakes, mixed herbs, oregano,

and salt. Add 2 tbsp oil and tomato ketchup. Gradually add water and knead to form a smooth dough.

- **Rest Dough:** Cover and rest the

dough for 15-20 minutes.

- **Roll Out Dough:** Divide the dough into small portions. Roll out each portion into a thin sheet.
- **Cut Mathri Shapes:** Cut the rolled dough into desired shapes (strips, squares, or diamonds).
- **Fry Mathri:** Heat oil in a deep-frying pan. Fry the mathri in batches until golden brown and crispy.
- **Drain Excess Oil:** Remove the fried mathri from oil and place on paper towels to drain excess oil.
- **Serve:** Enjoy your Pizza Mathri with your favourite dip or tea.

### TIPS:

- Adjust the amount of chili flakes according to your desired spice level.
- Fry at medium heat for even crispiness.

## PISTA NANKHATAI

CHEF AANAL KOTAK

PREP TIME: 15 MINUTES

COOK TIME: 15-20 MINUTES

TOTAL TIME: 30-35 MINUTES

### INGREDIENTS:

- 120g Ghee (Clarified Butter)
- 120g Powdered Sugar (Sieved)
- ¼ Tsp Cardamom Powder
- ¼ Tsp Salt
- 50g Pistachio Powder
- ¼ Cup Rava (Semolina)
- 180g All-Purpose Flour
- 3g Baking Powder
- Pistachios For Topping

### METHOD:

- **Prepare Dough:** Whisk ghee and powdered sugar until light and creamy.
- **Add Dry Ingredients:** Mix in pistachio powder, cardamom powder, salt, and rava.
- **Form Dough:** Gradually add flour and baking powder to form a soft

dough.

- **Shape Cookies:** Make small balls and flatten slightly. Top with pistachio powder.
- **Bake:** Preheat oven to 350°F (180°C). Bake for 15-20 minutes or until golden.
- **Cool:** Allow to cool completely before serving.

**TIPS:**

- Adjust baking time based on

**MIX CHIVDA RECIPE**

**CHEF AANAL KOTAK**

**PREP TIME:** 10 MINUTES

**COOK TIME:** 15 MINUTES

**SERVINGS:** 6-8

**INGREDIENTS FOR CHIVDA BASE:**

- 4 Tbsp Oil
- 1/2 Tsp Asafoetida (hing)
- 10-15 Curry Leaves
- 1/2 Tsp Turmeric Powder
- 1 Big Bowl Puffed Rice (mammra)
- Salt, to taste

**FOR FRYING:**

- 1 Medium Bowl Kheel Mammra
- 1 Cup Corn Chivda
- 1/3 Cup Peanuts

**FOR MASALA MIX:**

- Salt, to Taste
- 1 Tbsp Red Chilli Powder
- 1 Tsp Black Salt
- 1 Tsp Aamchur Powder (Dried Mango Powder)

**FOR MIXING AND GARNISH:**

- 1/2 Bowl Masala Boondi
- 1/2 Bowl Nylon Sev

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

• **PREPARE THE CHIVDA BASE:**

Heat oil in a kadhai over medium flame.

- Add asafoetida, curry leaves, and turmeric powder. Sauté for a few seconds.
- Add puffed rice and salt. Toss well and roast lightly until the mammra turns crisp and slightly hot.
- Transfer the roasted mixture to a large mixing bowl.

• **FRY THE INGREDIENTS:** In the same kadhai, fry Kheel mammra, corn chivda, and peanuts one by one until golden and crisp.

• Add all the fried ingredients to the mixing bowl with the roasted mammra.

• **ADD MASALA MIX:** Sprinkle salt,

red chili powder, black salt, and Aamchur powder over the mixture. Mix everything gently but thoroughly.

• **MIX AND GARNISH:** Add masala boondi and nylon sev to the mixture. Mix again carefully.

• **Cool and Store:** Let the chivda cool completely before storing it in an airtight container.

**SERVE:**

- Enjoy this crispy, tangy, and festive Mix Chivda with hot tea, perfect for winter evenings.

**About the author**

Aanal Kotak is one of the recognized Gujarati chefs and TV hosts. She owns restaurant brands like The Secret Kitchen and SouthAK. With over 10 global outlets under The Secret Kitchen brand spanning India, the USA, Canada, and Australia, Chef Aanal has become a global ambassador for modern Indian vegetarian dining. Beyond her restaurants, she has ventures like Sandoitchi, TSK Organics, and her FMCG line.

# The Sri Lankan Culinary Ambassador



**Tasha Marikkar** is a writer, marketer, music festival curator, amateur illustrator and an unofficial food-tourism ambassador for Sri Lanka. Born and raised on the island, she fondly calls herself a true achcharu – a delicious mix – reflecting her Colombo Chetty, Sinhalese and Ceylon Moor heritage. After spending over a decade in London working in advertising, she stepped away to write her first cookbook, *Jayaflava*. Today, she divides her time between recipe development, hosting pop-ups across the world and working toward her larger mission: creating solutions to fight hunger in Sri Lanka.

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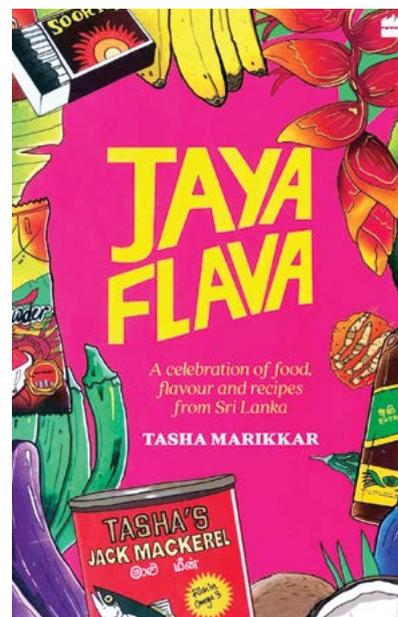
## What are your fond memories of food?

My childhood is filled with memories of wonderful meals shared with my family – my father's side hosting big Muslim feasts, and my mother's side gathering for Sunday lunches with yellow rice, six vegetable curries and black chicken curry laid out as a buffet. In Sri Lanka, food is community. It's bonding. I grew up eating meals that represented exactly who we

were – Colombo Moor, Chetty and Sinhalese – so every plate carried a mix of influences. If my heritage taught me anything, it's that Sri Lankan food is a beautiful amalgamation of many communities coming together.

## What inspired you to write *Jayaflava*?

I wanted people to truly see Sri Lankan cuisine in all its depth and complexity – not as a footnote to South Asia or reduced to "spicy curry and hoppers." Our food is



**She is the author of *Jayaflava: A Celebration of Food, Flavour and Recipes from Sri Lanka***

shaped by migration, trade, colonial history and coexistence.

*Jayaflava* is my way of honouring that richness while celebrating a small island with a big culinary identity.

My mixed heritage inspired the book. It showed me how nuanced, regional and seasonal Lankan food is. I felt compelled to record that history.

## Did you face any challenges researching and writing the book?

Absolutely. Sri Lankan recipes are often passed down through memory, not measurements – "a

splash," "a handful," "a mundu of." Translating that intuition without losing the soul of the dish was tough.

I cooked with home cooks, aunts, uncles; spent hours at markets speaking to vendors; tasted, adjusted and documented until the flavours felt authentic. It required patience, curiosity and...a lot of eating. I gained plenty of weight writing this book — but it was worth every bite!

**Do you find it difficult at your pop-ups to explain that Sri Lankan food is beyondoppers and coastal curries?**

Yes — but it's a wonderful opportunity. Hoppers and seafood are delicious, but they represent just a fraction of our food story. At pop-ups, I use the menu to weave multicultural stories: how colonisation shaped our ingredients, how particular dishes travelled to our shores, and why our flavours are so diverse.

Introducing dishes like jaggery beef curry, france appa and kiddu opens guests' eyes. Once they taste the diversity, they instantly understand the bigger picture.

**Which regional cuisines are featured in the book?**

Jayaflava highlights the flavours of Colombo, Jaffna, the Southern coast, the Estate regions and coastal Muslim communities. It explores Moor biriyani, Tamil seafood traditions, Sinhalese vegetarian and meat curries, and Burgher colonial dishes like lamprais and beef smore.

You'll also find Portuguese-inspired short eats, Dutch frikkadels, British cakes and teas — but presented not as foreign imports, rather as flavours Sri Lankans have reclaimed, adapted and made their own. The book is designed to introduce these concepts to first-time Lankan cooks. My next book will dive even deeper into regional specialties.

**How did you collect the recipes and research the stories behind them?**

The book grew from conversations. I asked: What are the essential

dishes for someone cooking Sri Lankan food for the first time? What represents all our communities? How do we explain this food heritage?

I travelled, cooked, ate, debated, took notes, read extensively and compared versions of the same dish across families and regions. This book isn't just my voice — it's a chorus of cooks who keep Sri Lankan food alive. The process took eight years, and that dedication is reflected in every page.

**What should be done to promote the cuisines of Sri Lanka?**

We need to champion diversity, not stereotypes. Sri Lankan food is not just "spicy curries" — it is multicultural, micro-regional and shaped by centuries of trade, migration and ritual.

To promote it globally, we need stronger storytelling, more research, greater media representation, Sri Lankan street-food culture abroad, and chefs who present our cuisine with pride and nuance. The goal is not just for the world to taste Sri Lanka — but to understand it.





# PUBLICATIONS



## KEY FEATURES

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