

# Parsiāna

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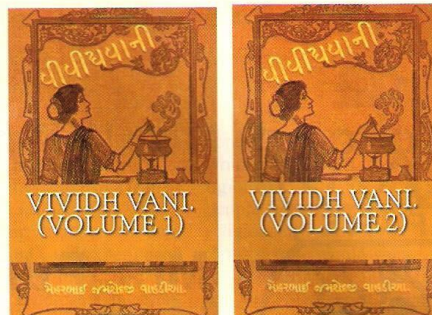
Zanzibar plates





# Reprinting culinary heritage

Farrokh Jijina



My original copy is now falling apart like a cracker paper, and is kept in sealed plastic bags. Worms are probably eating (it) away," noted Boston resident and culinary author of 12 cookbooks Rita Kapadia (pictured alongside), of the two volumes of *Vividh Vani* (Assorted dishes) she brought to the USA 30 years ago from Ahmedabad. Keen to preserve "our Parsi heritage," she used the help of Amazon Services to reprint the two-volume set comprising of 2,180 recipes in Gujarati that first appeared in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. "Preserving the work of (*Vividh Vani* author) Meherbai Wadia who passed away at an early age is my main motivation for reprinting it," the software professional told *Parsiana* via email in September 2018.

"We have managed to print the volumes on high quality glossy paper. You can now own brand new copies in strong paper bound books (pictured top) which will last for years," exulted Kapadia. "It took me six months to scan these recipes on a digital scanner, print and collate," she explained, adding that she first "made a handwritten index in English so I could search recipes and then read the Gujarati text and cook for my family here in USA." With each volume priced at USD 25 (Rs 1,816), and available on amazon.com, the first volume comprises 792 pages and the second, 778; both volumes measure 6 x 1.8 x 9 inches.

"This reprint is intended for book collectors...With the number of Parsis

who read Gujarati dwindling I am translating some recipes and posting them online on ParsiCuisine.com," noted the author. *Parsiana* has in the past provided translations of some recipes from the tomes ("Vintage viands," August 7, 2016).

The home chef has uploaded on her website "a guide to old measures and weights (*tipri, ratal, maund, seer/sehr, navtak and tola*) used in *Vividh Vani*. The original was written "in an era where all cooking was done on wood stoves and without fancy gadgets, no running water and no refrigeration, the books offer us an in-depth look at the hard life of the traditional Parsi lady of those times."

"I have been giving out free recipes, food news, health tips and articles on ParsiCuisine.com," noted Kapadia. Her vision for her website is "to make the unique (Parsi) diet and foods we have every day popular in America... My aim and effort is to maintain and preserve our recipes and traditions for... our next generation." Her cookbooks are available in paperback and Kindle versions and include volumes on pickles, chutneys, masalas, seafood, eggs, meats and the ubiquitous dhansak. What started as a hobby two decades ago "has become a passion and a rudder cum compass in my life," Kapadia noted. "Twenty-five percent of the sales go towards charity," she informed *Parsiana*.

With an aging Parsi population that can read and understand the somewhat archaic Gujarati used by Wadia in the

originals, sales could be a challenge. Yasmin Rao Bhumgara, resident of Kapadia's home city said, "I can't relate with it as I have no connection to its content nor am I well informed on it." A dipstick survey of a 132-member Facebook food page "Recipes and Ramblings (RnR)" revealed the following: Baroda based food lover Urvakshi Engineer said she would pay up to Rs 1,000 for an English version of the recipes "for sentimentality." London based Dolly Contractor said she would pay five GBP (Rs 478) for the Gujarati reprint. While Karachi based TV chef Zarnak Sidhwa said she would happily buy English translations, with conversions for the measures, Indore based Zarina Cama who administers RnR said, "No use to me as I can't read it." Poona based food blogger Kainaz Writer Bokdawalla said, "I'd pay any price for the English version... If it's reprinted in Gujarati then no, I wouldn't buy it."

Surat based home chef Katy Messman who runs a catering business inherited her copy of *Vividh Vani* from a family member. "I treasure it most gratefully," she said in a telephonic interview with *Parsiana* on September 26. "Whilst I was going through the recipes, I was surprised to see various, never heard of recipes... and thought to myself... the women (of) those days were so talented and creative, and we are the lucky ones to have inherited their talent... How those ladies made the most out of the simplest of ingredients, with no modern amenities," she wrote on the Facebook page "Katy's Delights"

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that she administers. Her page includes a recipe for an unusual “*Bhujelu Paneer* Custard (Baked cottage cheese custard)” from Wadia’s recipe book. Messman has “given a slight twist to the recipe by caramelizing the base and instead of butter, I have added buttered bread, rest all remains the same,” she noted. She said she would not buy the reprint.

Perhaps Kapadia’s translations of the heritage recipes into English should fare well. Else Wadia’s efforts at putting together in the first volume alone, 76 varieties of pickles [including nine versions of gor-keri (jaggery-mango)], 60 ways to cook eggs, 57 kinds of cakes, 36 flavors of ice-cream, 32 ways of making cutlets, 27 custards, 17 cheesecakes and 15 omelettes will be lost to Parsi food lovers. ❀