

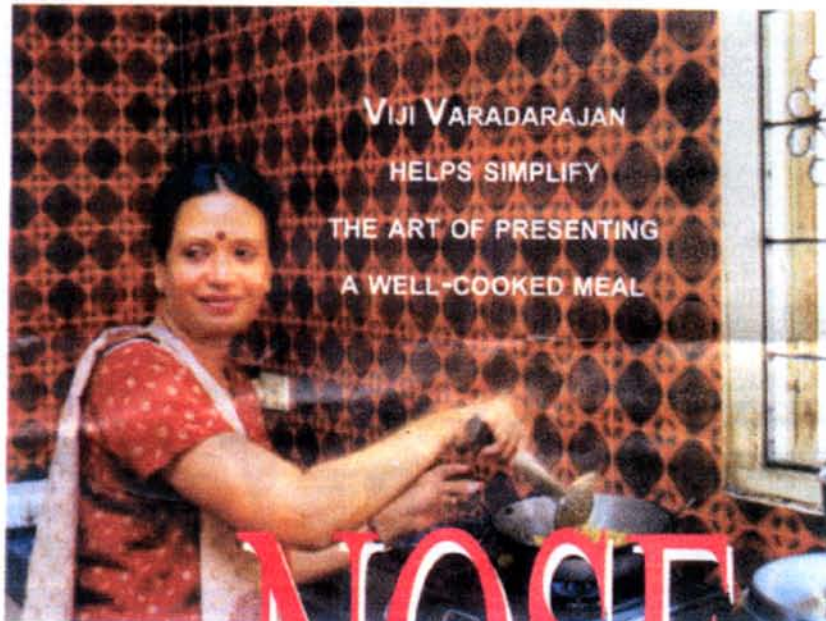
IN my earliest attempts at cooking, as a new bride, 4,000kms away from Amma's kitchen, I was often guided by my nose. Something in my olfactory senses would stir as the *methi* seeds browned in ghee, a familiar smell wafting straight out of my paternal home. Not an instinctive cook by any stretch of imagination, I relied rather heavily on my nose to get my recipes right. Today's new brides, especially

send you home" her ignorance began to take on the proportions of a cardinal sin. But Viji was soon to discover that her mother-in-law was not only a great cook but also a wonderful teacher. "I learnt cooking and I learnt to like it," says the lady who can today rustle up a Continental, North Indian or Chinese meal without suffering palpitations.

Having taken her first lessons from ma-in-law who was 'so

measures which hugely simplify what could be a tedious chore. Describing the book as her 'first attempt at writing' after her course in journalism almost 30 years ago, the author has an impressive compilation of 197 recipes from Thanjavur and Palakkad kitchens. From the simple *Mor Kootan* to the challenging *Elai Adai*, and *Paruppu Usili* to a tangy *Kothamalli Thovaiyal*, she has

Seven Shot



## What the **NOSE** Does Not Know

those of Palakkad and Thanjavur origins, need look no further than Viji Varadarajan's 'Samayal - The Pleasures of South Indian Vegetarian Cooking.'

Viji echoes the dilemma of many a new bride - "I didn't know anything about cooking when I got married." As if that wasn't bad enough, she married into a traditional Thanjavur family which considered details like 'the colour of the food' to be very significant. When someone told Viji, "If you don't get it right, your mother-in-law could

precise with her quantities', Viji never made a mistake when she cooked her debut meal. "The concept of *kai vaasanai* is all nonsense. If you know the exact measurements, you can get any dish absolutely right," she adds.

So measurements is what makes *Samayal* such an easy-to-follow guide for first-timers and those who have sacrificed authenticity at the altar of convenience. For the recipes don't defeat you with their 'gms' and 'ounces'. Instead, Viji has chosen 'tsp' and 'cups' as her

categories that include even podis and pickles.

There are useful suggestions at the end of each section - for eg 'roasting *hing* and grinding with the rest of the masala gives an added flavour.' Food texture has been well-captured in the photographs by V K Rajamani but I wish kitchen utensils of yesteryears like the *eeya chombu* and *kal chatti* had been featured. But that's like saying the salt is a wee bit less in an otherwise first-rate sambar.

"This is an easy way of doing

what people call difficult cooking," says Viji who has left large white spaces alongside the recipes where the user might wish to jot down her own notes. With her new-found love for South Indian cooking, the lady who learnt to swim at age 31 is also a Kathak and Bharatnatyam dancer and is now busy getting ready to take her French exams. She certainly has her plate full but she's quite certain that she hasn't bitten off more than she can chew.

• Uma Girish

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