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Food AND Beverage Buzz

A YUMMYLICIOUS JOURNEY...

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SAARC countries US \$20

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DINEOUT
BLIND
TASTING

GLOBALLY
EMBRACING
ECSTASY IN
MALDIVES

Palakkad
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About **INK AND FLAVOURS**

Kaveri Ponnappa is the author of the renowned book *The Vanishing Kodavas*. She is also a name to reckon with in the food world for her ubiquitous writings

Team FnB BUZZ



Kaveri Ponnappa

Kaveri Ponnappa studied at the Lady Shri Ram College, new Delhi. She spent 15 years researching for her book *The Vanishing Kodavas* and she is also an ace writer known for her well researched narratives on food. Her food images are an epitome of elegance and binds the spectators within the depth of the imagery. Here is what she has to say about her food world.

On researching and blogging about food

I came into food writing at a slant. Although I have been very interested in food and cooking right through my life and had written about food before, it was not my main focus. As a student of anthropology, I was aware of the important role food played in people's lives and how it was all tied into their culture and identity. But it was while I was researching for my first book, *The Vanishing Kodavas* (www.thevanishingkodavas.com), an in-depth cultural study of the Kodava people, I had a first-hand experience of seeing how a cuisine is born out of a particular landscape, culture and history. The fieldwork for my book involved a great deal of travel to the more remote, rural areas of Kodagu (Coorg). I often had to spend a lot of time waiting for a particular ceremony or event to begin; I would be invited to a home for a meal or to spend the night as a guest of a person I barely knew. Coming together over food was the easiest way to communicate with people. For the first time, I was able to see the cultural framework in which the food that I had been eating since childhood and later cooked for my family, had evolved. I began to ask questions, collect recipes and there began another, parallel journey.

The best dishes you have tasted over the years

It is very difficult to answer this,

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because there have been so many. But if I were to narrow that to what kind of dishes, I would say some of the simplest ones have been the best. For instance, wood fire roasted wild mushrooms from Kodagu, rubbed with just salt and red chilli powder made from bird's eye chillies, and the juice of native limes. The flavours are simply stunning, so fresh and vivid, each bite drenched in the earthy scent and taste of the mushrooms. It's a very intense experience.

Then there is a curry of freshwater fish cooked with green peppercorns from Kuttanad that I can still taste. The flavours were so pure and clear, with minimum fuss. Elsewhere, there's Chef Enrique Olvera's duck carnitas; tortillas; black bean tamal; corn husk meringue, all at Cosme, NYC. It's the best possible expression of a modern interpretation of an ancient cuisine, in this case, Mexican. Nearer home, Chef Manu Chandra cooks an exquisite velouté of shellfish with pulp of the humble drumstick.

Changes seen in the last decade in the way Indians eat

There are so many more restaurants, and people are eating out more than they ever have before. There has always been street food and tiny, local eateries. But now people are willing to extend their experiences to unfamiliar cuisines, both Indian and international. The interest in drinking and learning about wines has grown significantly. Cocktails, gin and exotic infusions are all trending. The downside is flashy, poorly researched restaurants that rely on publicity and an ill-informed public, to sell really bad food, not particularly cheap. And the rise of

the biryani, rolls and kebabs, all touted as 'fiery or spicy' as convenience foods, since people have less time to cook at home.

Dishes you love to cook

Very simple foods with an emphasis on freshness and flavour; a great fish or mutton curry, vegetables with the lightest seasonings and a freshly cooked sauce for pasta. I love making pickles, jams and chutneys at home; it's a bit of an obsession. I find that a good pickle can lift a meal out of the routine and really excite the palate. There's nothing to beat a homemade jam made from fruit in season.

On 'The Coorg Table'

The blog has been up for a few



years now, and there's a wonderful interaction that has developed with regular readers, who look forward to posts. I had the privilege of watching my grandmother cook, and learn first-hand from my mother-in-law. But this way of passing down culinary knowledge is disappearing quickly. The speed at which our culinary traditions are changing has made me want to document things in a more organised way. So yes, there is a book in the pipeline.

How you perceive food while writing

To begin with, your visual perceptions change. You see the same dish that you love for its taste and flavours as something much more, a thing of creativity and beauty. This is particularly true when, as in my case, I do all the cooking and food styling myself. You also pay attention to the quality of writing. Some of the best food writing is great prose, literature,

worthy of the culinary experience. In a much more fundamental and more important way, it makes you think about food production, farming, sustainability and the future of food. You write with greater respect about ingredients and foods you had taken for granted.

Favourite food destinations

Every part of the world has something wonderful to offer, so I'm going to summon up old taste memories. I used to live in Mhow and we would drive to Indore just for the food.

Facts learned while writing on food

That I actually ate and loved ants, silkworms, beetles and much more that was offered to me as food. Also, the flavour intense and immensely thought provoking dishes that chefs like Dan Barber create from the parts of vegetables that we usually ignore, discard – or never see. **tribBUZZ**

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Awe-inspiring images of food made and styled by Kaveri Ponnappa

