

Like all festive occasions, the Festival of Lights is a culinary extravaganza.

**Aneeta Sundararaj** looks at some tasty fare

**T**HIS Deepavali, as you visit a typical open house, you'll most likely come away satiated with the savoury and sweet dishes offered. But if you visit households where the hosts come from different parts of India you will see a greater variety in festive dishes, other than the staples like muruku, cookies and cakes.

**EARLY START**

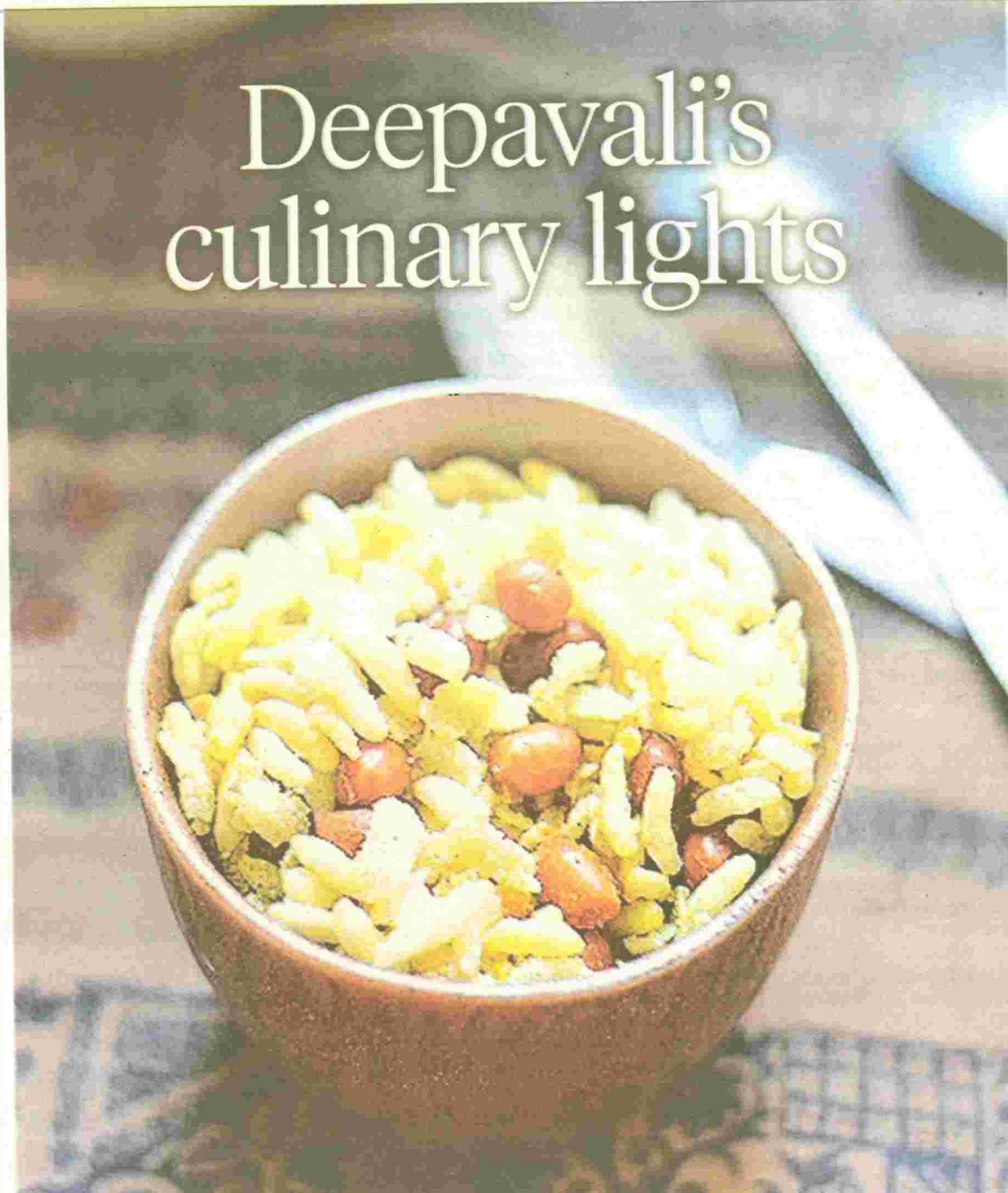
Tharini Prakasha Rao, marketing executive of Healthy Homes Marketing says that when his mother was still alive, the food extravaganza at home began early. "My mother would wake us up early by 4 or 5am - for an oil bath. Then, at 7.30am, visitors would start to arrive. The whole day would be spent serving them and also enjoying ourselves. They came for my mother's chicken curry, a special preparation."

Rao elaborates: "I don't know where she got this recipe from. But I know she never used onion. Only garlic and ginger. Then, there was the cur'ry powder she used to make herself. She never bought the curry powder from the store. Everything was made from scratch."

Other than this, Rao, 52, also remembers a dish from Andhra Pradesh called gongura pachadi. Made from the gongura leaf (red sorrel leaf), Rao describes the dish as a pickle. "It's very popular and the recipe usually includes red chilli, oil, garlic flakes, mustard seeds and salt."

**DIFFERENT TASTES**

Visit a Malayali home and you might be served iddyapam (string hoppers) accompanied by fish molee, a light,



# Deepavali's culinary lights

What we know as **Bombay Mix** is called **Chivda** in Maharashtra.

mildly spiced, turmeric scented curry featuring coconut milk and fleshy fish. "In some homes, this can be quite spicy," says Rao.

Northwest of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh is the state of Maharashtra, where the food served during Deepavali is decidedly different. Dr Sheila Gharpuray, 76, a grandmother of six from Pune, explains that "Diwali Faral" describes the variety of savoury snacks that are made at

home and eaten during the five days of celebration. She adds: "Especially in a Brahmin household, all these snacks will be vegetarian."

One that resonates with many Malaysians is the one we call Bombay Mix. But in Maharashtra, it's called chivda and is far milder in taste. That said, throughout the state, there are variations of chivda. For example, there are some that just contain puffed rice. Those made in Dr

almonds, raisins and milk. Many Tamilians may recognise this sweet that is similar to their nei urundai or ghee balls.

Garima Mathur, an expatriate from Delhi says: "On Deepavali morning, we have a Lakshmi puja. For this, we will prepare several types of food."

The 36-year-old rattles off names of dishes and sweet like gulab jamun. Then she mentions something called gujiya. Her description of how to make this dish and the apparatus she uses are very similar to how our curry puffs are made. The main difference, however, is the filling. Our curry puffs are savoury. The filling for gujiya is sweet and includes almonds, raisins and a touch of cardamom.

With such a variety in traditional foods, there's certainly much to look forward to in the festival of lights.



**Tharini Prakasha Rao** misses his late mother's chicken curry.



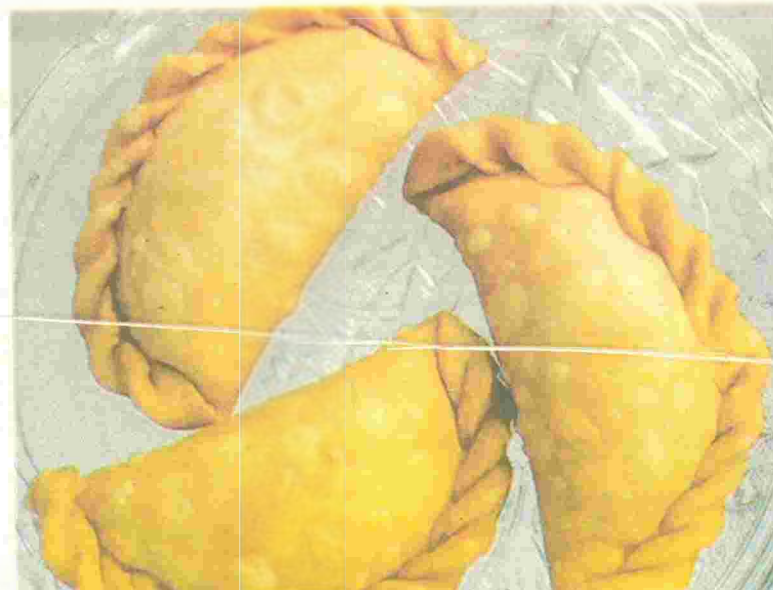
**Garima Mathur** delights in the variety of food found during Deepavali.

Sheila's hometown, Pune, may have potato and those closer to the city of Nasik may be a little spicy. Add a few nuts or raisins and this addictive snack becomes exotic.

No Deepavali is complete without laddoo. Once again, though, the laddoo made in the south of India differ from those in the north in terms of taste and look. Dr Sheila offers an example of a family favourite, the besan laddoo. This is made from gram flour, sugar,



**Gongura leaves** are used in the Andhra Pradesh dish called **Gongura Pachadi**.



**Gujiya** is like to our Malaysian **curry puffs**.



**String hoppers** or **iddyapam**.