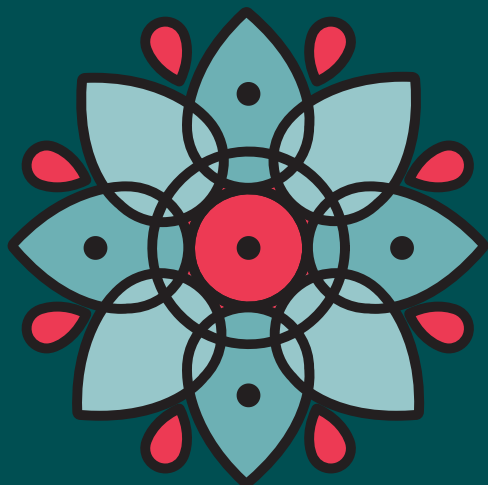


Archaeology of the Roti

This menu is the result of research on reconstructions of multi-diasporic communities in the United States through their rotis. It centers the restaurant as a place where these reconstructions occur within the confines of colonialism and capitalism. This menu recenters roti dishes from South and Southeast Asia through the narratives of Tamil migration, colonialism, and shared history that brought these foods together.

The goal is to answer the question "How are reconstructions of Sri Lankan, Indian and Malaysian roti informed by the history and migration of Tamil diasporas across these regions?"



W H E A T - B A S E D

PAROTTA ~ பரோட்டா

Parotta is a flaky layered wheat bread that moved between Sri Lanka and Southern India through Tamil labor migrations. It's Malaysian counterpart Roti Canai is also the product of Tamil migrations across South and Southeast Asia.

KOTTHU ROTI ~ கொத்து ரொட்டி

Kotthu roti in Tamil literally means chopped bread and is stir fried with vegetables, eggs, and meat. This dish is a staple in street food stalls across Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu and is very similar in preparation to the Malaysian Roti Canai.

ROTI TELUR ~ ரோட்டி தெலுர்

Roti Telur is a flatbread cooked in an egg batter and found in Malaysian mamak stalls. These street food stalls are run by Tamil Muslim 'mamas' or uncles. Roti Telur is often anglicized to French Toast for the understanding of the Western audience.

ROTI JALA ~ ரோட்டி ஜலா

Roti Jala is a netted roti made by drizzling the batter across the pan. This dish is another staple at mamak stalls but has inspired similar dishes like jalara or net dosa in India. Interchanging roti, bread, and dosa shows these movements linguistically.

ROTI TISU ~ திசு ரொட்டி

Roti Tisu is a paper thin roti dish found across mamak stalls in Malaysia. It is often also called Thosai Tisu as well. This indexes the fluidity of rice and wheat in breads and also the presence of Tamil cultural and linguistic migrations in Malaysia.



RICE - BASED

PUTTU ~ பிட்டு

Puttu is a cylindrical dish of steamed ground rice and grated coconut. It can be served as a desert with coconut milk and palm sugar or as a savory dish with curry. Similar dishes are also found across maritime Southeast Asia and in Malaysia as putu piring.

APPAM ~ அப்பம்

Appam is a fermented rice flour bread from Southern India and Sri Lanka that is often served with sweet coconut milk or curry. It is often anglicized to 'pancake' which indexes it as a type of bread much like the parotta.

IDIYAPPAM ~ இடியப்பம்

Idiyappam or nool puttu is a flat disk of steamed rice noodles eaten with curry or sweetened coconut milk. It is associated with Tamil cuisines in India and Sri Lanka as well as in Malaysia where it is called putu mayam.

THOSAI ~ தோசை

Similar to the rotis eaten at mamak stalls, thosai in India and Sri Lanka come in many varieties and patterns including with eggs, masala, cheese, vegetables. Linguistically, paper roast dosa and roti tissu both use paper as a qualifier for thinness and crispiness.

IDIYAPPAM KOTTHU ~ கொத்து இடியாப்பம்

This variation of kothu using rice noodles instead of roti strips again emphasizes the fluidity of rice and wheat based dishes in this region. This dish can be found in Malaysian eateries as well due to the prominence of Tamil diasporas in the country.



Diasporic restaurants face cultural homogenization and redefinition of their authenticity by Western capitalism.

To balance preserving food practices while assimilating to a distilled version of their culture, certain practices end up sidelined.

But food across South Asian diasporas is a key way of knowing and preserving culture.

These layered practices enable us to view the histories of Tamil migration through multiple perspectives.