

# A Tale of Two Indias Told Through Food and Dance



## Wahyuni Kamah

India, the second most populous country in the world, is as colorful as Indonesia in terms of its ethnicities, dialects, food, culture and natural landscapes.

Having had the chance to visit two different regions in both the north and south, I was lucky enough to be exposed to the incredible diversity of the world's largest democracy.

Nearly 2,200 kilometers southeast of India's capital New Delhi is Chennai. This is where I called home initially. The capital of Tamil Nadu state, it is situated on the Bay of Bengal and, like Jakarta, Chennai has two seasons: wet and dry. Its native people are the Tamil, known for their darker complexion and distinct language.

While in the south, I visited my Tamil friend, Chitradeepa. She invited me to a wedding reception in Chennai for her friend — to which I obliged with much excitement.

We arrived in the reception hall to be greeted by pretty girls in glittering saris. Each guest received a bud of coconut shoot wrapped in a small, bright red bag as a wedding souvenir.

It was then that I learned that coconuts have a significant meaning in Indians' religious, cultural and social life. Coconut trees are referred to as *kalpavriksha*, or "tree which grants all blessings."

"The red color means purity and fertility," Deepa explained to me.

In the hall, the women were all dressed in beautiful saris or salwar kameez. Embellishing the walls were paintings of mangoes — India's national fruit, according to Deepa.

She then invited me to the dining room on the second floor. Separating it from the reception hall were five rows of long tables with plastic chairs. Several guests already seated.

Once a table was occupied, attendants began setting down banana leaves in front of the diners. Another followed with bottles of water. The real show started when different attendants began bringing out different kinds of dishes. The synchronization while serving interested me the most, as all knew how and where to place each of the dishes.

Those who think that Indian food is about solely about the distinctive, yellow curry are wrong. In my time there, I experienced 21 dishes, all with different tastes and texture — including chappati, sambar, curd, chips and sweets.

All the dishes at the wedding reception were vegetarian and arranged in a particular sequence, the order being so important that it has its own philosophy.

Deepa pointed out some of the ingredients in the dishes while also telling me which ones to try first.

As I looked around, I saw to my fascination that all the other guests were eating with their bare hands.

In the hall, Deepa greeted the bride as

Guests sit down to eat at a reception in Chennai, left; Delicacies are prepared for all to see, bottom left; Betel leaves flavored as a treat for guests at the reception.

JG Photos/  
Wahyuni Kamah

I looked on at the dessert table, which held betel leaves for chewing.

What a treat, I thought. The betel leaf and areca nut are regarded as lucky symbols. Different from traditional betel chewing, here I could ask for a sweet, minty, spicy or hot leaf. To generate the desired taste, an attendant would add a particular ingredient onto the betel leaf, which was already smeared with liquid from the areca nut.

That, then, was my south Indian culinary adventure through the microcosm of a traditional wedding reception.

North India presented different although equally enriching treats. My base was in the city of Amritsar in Punjab state, about 460 kilometers northeast of Delhi.

Punjab is geographically and culturally different from Tamil Nadu. It has three seasons — winter, summer and monsoon — and the people have a fairer complexion than those in the south and speak Punjabi, which, like Tamil, has its own alphabet.

Punjab is also known as the land of the Sikh, with most men I saw on the street wearing the traditional turban. I spent most of my time in the village of Rajewal, surrounded by sprawling green fields.

Located in the middle of a wheat field was the village inn where I planned to stay, the Virasat Haveli. My arrival seemed to be perfectly timed as the weather was so nice.

In the village, I could see people turning cow patties into fuel bricks. Village life seemed humble, but effective too, as everyone worked the fields.

The most interesting part of staying at the inn was to watch the dynamic *bhangra giddha* performance put on for guests at night.

Bhangra giddha is a Punjabi folk dance. In the past, it was performed to celebrate the harvest. Different from the dances in Bollywood movies, this folk dance is truly electrifying in terms of its music and the movement.

Although the music was not live, I was more than entertained.

The main dancers, a man and a woman, and the three supporting male dancers all wore bright uniforms. The men wore *kurtas*, a loose, collarless, tunic-length shirt, as well as a *lungi*, a long, loose loincloth tied around the waist. The main male dancer also wore a buttonless waistcoat and the traditional Sikh turban. The supporting male dancers had intricately tied *pag*, tied differently from the traditional turban as it is enlarged with a fan-shaped *turla*.

The female dancer wore a salwar kameez, baggy pants and a loose tunic, with a long scarf over her neck and shoulders.

Both bhangra music and dance are transformative and take viewers to a place where they, too, want to dance.

Having been lucky enough to see two different parts of India, I can say the country is truly worlds apart from anywhere else.

## 2015 UPCOMING EVENTS

### INDONESIA

**28 MAR**

**2PM WORLD TOUR 'GO CRAZY' IN JAKARTA**

2PM WORLD TOUR 'GO CRAZY' IN JAKARTA | 28 MAR 2014 | ISTORA SENAYAN, JAKARTA

The Popular Korean idol group 2PM who just recently proved its mighty power in Korea and Japan after releasing the newest album "Go Crazy" and "Midaretemina".

**TICKET PRICE**

DIAMOND - IDR. 2.100.000,-  
FESTIVAL - IDR. 1.750.000,-  
GOLD - IDR. 1.550.000,-  
SILVER - IDR. 1.100.000,-  
BRONZE - IDR. 650.000,-

**23 MAY**

**BEST OF BEST CONCERT IN JAKARTA**

BEST OF BEST CONCERT IN JAKARTA | 23 MAY 2015 | SENAYAN, JAKARTA

Best of Best Concert have characteristic with Best of Best line up artists in their respective categories. Guest star is the artist that already have fans and extensive demand worldwide.

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**15 FEB**

**HOLI COLOR FESTIVAL**

HOLI COLOR FESTIVAL | 15 FEB 2015 | PARKIR TIMUR SENAYAN, JAKARTA

The special feature is that the people paint themselves with various colours and throw colourful powder in the air to express the freedom and to colour their everyday life.

**14 FEB**

**ONE FC: ODYSSEY OF CHAMPIONS**

ONE FC: ODYSSEY OF CHAMPIONS | 14 FEB 2015 | ISTORA SENAYAN, JAKARTA

Indonesian MMA icon Fransino "The Pitbull" Tirta will lead the contingent of local fighters with a co-main event showdown against American MMA legend Jens "Lil Evil" Pulver.

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**29 JAN**

**MICHAEL BUBLE**

MICHAEL BUBLE | 29 JAN 2015 | INDONESIA CONVENTION EXHIBITION (ICE), BSD CITY

Michael Bublé is a singer, songwriter and actor born Canadian who has won many awards, including four Grammy Awards and won many awards Juno Awards.

**22 JAN**

**MAC DEMARCO LIVE IN JAKARTA**

MAC DEMARCO LIVE IN JAKARTA | 22 JAN 2015 | THE FOUNDRY NO. 8 (SCBD)

The charming Canadian songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and multimedia artist, along with his band, will be bringing his dreamy lo-fi "jazz jazz" sound to Indonesia for the first time.

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**18-20 SEP**

**2015 FORMULA 1 SINGAPORE AIRLINES SINGAPORE GRAND PRIX**

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Race fans can enjoy significant savings of up to 25% off regular ticket prices during the early bird phase. DON'T MISS IT!

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**15% OFF!**

**ALIVE MUSEUM SINGAPORE**

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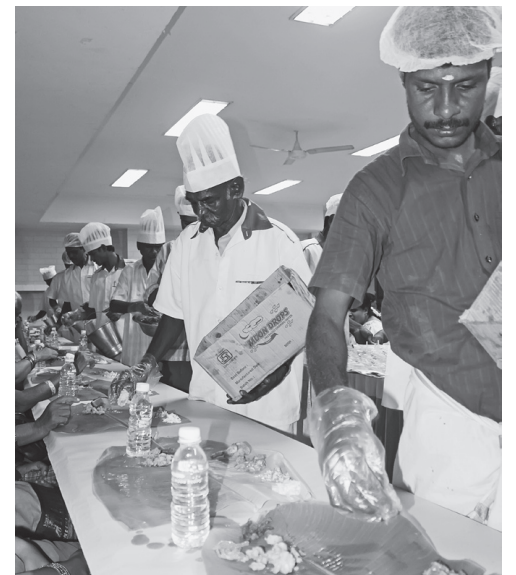
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### Outlets:

KIOSTIX Box Office (Ruko Golden Boulevard R2 38-39 Tangerang) | Pacific Place (5th floor) | Pluit Village | Lippo Mall Puri | Pejaten Village | Cibubur Junction | Gajah Mada Plaza | The Plaza Semanggi | Mall Artha Gading | Bandung Indah Plaza | Palembang Square | Mall Alam Sutra