

Ride for a Dosa by Vidya Panicker

As a full time resident on the Indian soil, one has a certain amount of commitment and responsibility towards those (un)fortunate brothers and sisters who fall under the category of a Non-Resident Indian (NRI). Even if the aforementioned NRI is a distant cousin, who is the ideal male child in your mother's opinion (she believes that the weed he talks about is some kind of American leafy vegetable that he enjoys eating), who speaks your name with an accent, making 'Akshith' sound like some variety of fancy shit, who fans his perspiration with every bit of paper available, cursing Indian humidity and who incessantly smells of mosquito repellent and mouthwash.

So this cousin, on his recent visit to India decided to bestow the blessing of his presence at our humble abode, much to the joy of my mother who believed that his proximity would help me get my life 'on track', not that I ever believed it to be off track. Anyways, 'dude' as he calls everyone else came home and much to my surprise, we were having a pleasant time together when I asked him what he missed the most (if anything at all) about India. Without as much as a thought he replied 'Masala Dosa'.

For those unfamiliar with Masala Dosa, it is an Indian rice flour pancake (Dosa), stuffed with Masala, a filling made with potatoes, onions, carrots and beetroots, flavored deliciously and rolled over, as if to hide the surprise inside. A Masala Dosa is the most delicious breakfast, a light lunch and a delectable evening snack. Because of the structure with the filling hidden, some people also refer to it as 'Pregnant Dosa'. If dude wanted Masala Dosa while on Indian soil, I had to make sure he got it. Though this delicacy is available in most of the small time restaurants, there were some shops with brand names which serve only Dosa and its varieties. I knew a couple of these places and decided that I would take him to one of those specialized 'Dosa Corners' as they called it.

After a night spent with dude, where he even overlooked the abundance of mosquitoes to talk about his childhood holidays in India where he went with mom and dad to a groovy restaurant only to eat Masala Dosa and through the day when we ate nothing else in anticipation of the evening treat, dude and I got on to my 1980 model yellow Lamby scooter and sped towards the best Dosa corner of the town. Our anticipation was doused in ice cold water when the waiter with a fancy crown on his head humbly informed us that of the 16 varieties of Dosa stated on their menu, all the 15 except Masala Dosa were available. Strike by the local potato vendors!

“Would we care for a plain Dosa, ghee Dosa, cheese Dosa or chicken Dosa?” he asked.

Of course we didn't care for anything other than a Masala Dosa and walked out, sufficiently mourning our loss.

Now, my esteem was in peril. I had promised my NRI brother a bite of unadulterated taste and not able to keep the promise was the greatest insult on my nationalism and pride.

“There's this other joint”, I told him, “a little far, a lot far in fact, but let's drive there”.

I looked at my Lamby scooter again, a genre of vehicle seen more in museums than on roads, and sighed. I could only pray that she lasted the 60 km journey that I was about take to feed my emaciated cousin. Dude hugged me and held on to me as if we were college lovers, in the first week of our affair, as my poor Lamby grunted and grumbled its way to our destination in over 2 hours. Since the strike of potato vendors was regional, this joint did serve Masala Dosa and we were about to be satiated.

“2 Masala Dosas and 2 filter coffees”, I ordered and we waited.

On a wide steel plate which could seat my posterior if I really worked out for a week, the waiter brought our Masala Dosas, hot coconut chutney and sambar. Dude, who was overjoyed at finally being able to relive his childhood memories, was deliriously drooling by the time we were served. I broke a piece of Dosa, dipped it in hot chutney and took a bite.

“Ha! if there is a heaven on earth, it is here and now, with this Masala Dosa dissolving in my mouth!!”.

I opened my eyes to derive the ultimate pleasure from watching dude eating. And the sight!

With a steel spoon, my cousin was scooping out the potato masala out of the dosa, on to the waste pan on the table.

“Gas”, he said, “potato gives me gas”.

The pain of it was beyond words. Not only had he made me drive my sick Lamby in an utter state of disrepair to the distance, but with the precision that would humble an abortion specialist, he was scooping out the best part of Masala Dosa, leaving behind the plain dough, that I could have made for him at home effortlessly.

I refrained from talking to my mother about the incident for days afterwards for fear of being transformed into a comic hero but I did manage to ask dude if he threw away the patty from his burger every time he ate it to avoid gas.

He replied yes.

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