

Mango Bite Summers : ഒരു ഓർമ്മ.....



These right here are candied nuggets of my childhood. They have all the sweet-tanginess of a sultry Indian summer, laced with the delicate whiff of nostalgia.

I remember walking down my street to the sundry shop around the corner many a time- to grab an inland for my grandmother to write a letter to my aunt; for a little sweet or savory fix; or to guzzle down a salted fresh lime-soda when the craving struck.

Thangal maman's little store had seemed a magical place then, with its tall glass jars filled with Mango Bite, Parry's orange candy, Lacto King, crisp coin shaped egg biscuits, Parle-G, and

gooseberries pickled in brine with hot green chillies. There would also be little sachets of sundried raw mangoes caked with rock salt and chilly powder; bright red, tart lemon pickle, candied mango pulp and crates of green-glass soda bottles with marble stoppers. There was also a drawer filled with sundries like inland mails and envelopes of all kinds, Reynolds pens and assorted stationery. Also basic toiletry items- toothbrushes, tooth pastes and colorful tongue cleaners; Cuticura powder tins, sachet garlands of Sunsilk and Shikakai shampoo, Carefree sanitary pads, bars of Lifebuoy, Chandrika and Lux soap, and

tubes of Fair and Lovely and Vicco Turmeric

Thangal maman had the kindest smile, and startlingly blue eyes against swarthy skin. Every transaction would be accompanied by a polite enquiry about how my grandmother or other members of the family were doing, or how I was faring at school. He affectionately called me "pulla" (meaning child) in that endearing way that I associate with the muslim community of Perumbavoor, my hometown. As I left his store, he'd always offer me a complimentary piece of candy- either a Mango Bite or one of the Parry's orange candy- both of which he knew, were my favourites.

Many years later, after I got married, my husband's uncle (dad's older sister's husband), who had a special fondness for me, would always offer me a handful of Mango Bite whenever we'd meet. He owned the local bookstore/reading room, and everytime I would stop by to rent a book or to exchange pleasantries, Vidyammavan would reach into a little jar and offer me a few of these much loved candies wrapped in a bit of crumpled newspaper. I remember the last time we met, he had come to see me at Anil's, and how apologetic he had been about not having any Mango Bite for me. Told me he had looked for them

at a few different places but they were not as easy to come by as they used to be. I told him that was perfectly okay, of course, and how much I appreciated the thought. Little did I know that would be my last meeting with him. He would unexpectedly pass from a fever a few months later.

So many warm, sweet, nostalgic memories tucked inside these bright yellow wrappers! When I saw that my local Indian grocery store here in the US had Mango Bite on their inventory, I felt like a little girl again as I ordered a pack! When it arrived, I did not wait a moment to rip open the cover, unwrap a piece and pop it into my watering mouth.

All these years later, they still taste the same: sweet-tangy....like a sultry Indian summer, laced with the delicate whiff of nostalgia.

Footnote: Thangal maman is old now. His son now sits at the shop. I did stop by for a salted fresh lime-soda on my last visit.



Priya Menon is a freelance writer based out of Tampa, Florida in the USA. She is married to Anil, my (S.Sunil) friend and batch-mate from my undergrad days at Bharat Mata College, Thrikkakkara. Although they have lived in the US for nearly 30 years, Kerala has an irreplaceable place in their hearts.