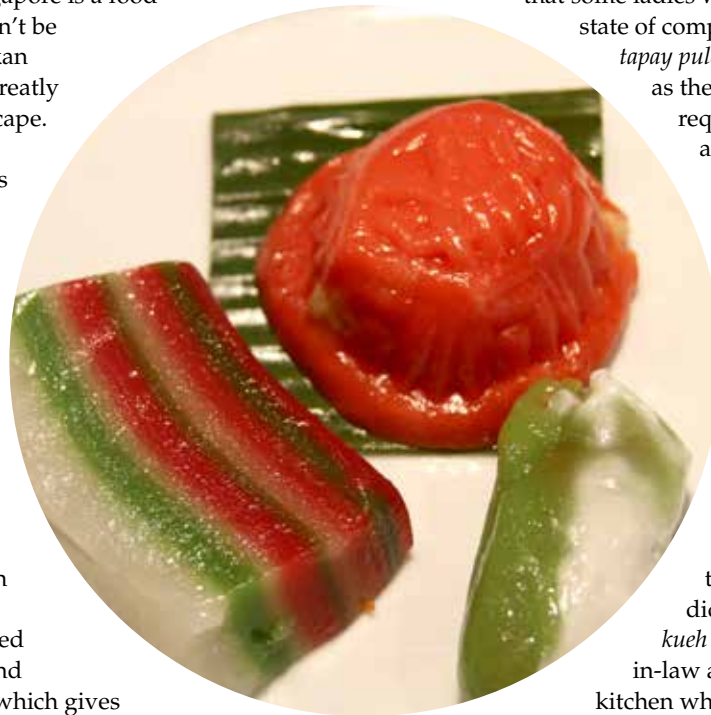


# Kueh Kueh Peranakan

By Dinesh Sathisan

There is no doubt that Singapore is a food lover's paradise and it wouldn't be wrong to say that the Peranakan community has contributed greatly to Singapore's culinary landscape. Interestingly, it could be said that Peranakan food embodies what 'Singapore food' is all about, as it brings together the gastronomic influences of Chinese, Malay and Indian food to form a unique cuisine. Say "Peranakan" and foodies immediately think of the mouth-watering *Ayam Buah Keluak* (chicken cooked with the nuts of the *Pangium edule*) and the *Babi Pongteh* (braised pork with salted bean paste). Some instantly think of the *sambal belacan* (a pounded condiment of chilli peppers and prawn paste with lime juice) which gives an extra kick to Peranakan cuisine. For those with a sweet tooth, Peranakan desserts (*kueh kueh*) are an all-time favourite and remain famous among the various other Peranakan foods. *Ondeh-Ondeh* (glutinous rice-balls filled with palm sugar), *Kueh Bahulu* (mini sponge cake) and *Kueh Kaswi* (rice cakes made with palm sugar) are every diabetic's nightmare.



*Kueh Angku, Kueh Bugis and Lapis Sagu*

that some ladies would, "strip themselves to a state of complete undress" while preparing *tapay pulot* (fermented glutinous rice) as they believed that this was a pre-requisite for the production of a very sweet cake. Talk about extremes! Some Peranakans never divulged their *kueh* recipes owing to the superstitious belief that they could never produce the *kueh* to perfection again if they gave the recipe to someone else. The family recipes for Peranakan *kueh* were also secretly guarded by mothers who only gave the recipes to their daughters. The writer was told that some mothers-in-law did not even share the family *kueh* recipes with their daughters-in-law and sent them out of the kitchen when the *kueh* was prepared. Peranakans believed that food presentation was just as important as the

taste of the food. The collection of *chupu* (a small, ornately decorated, covered pot) that you see at the Peranakan Museum was used, among other things, for serving the *kueh ee*, a dessert of red and white glutinous rice-balls in syrup, traditionally given to the bride and groom during their marriage ceremony. *Kueh ee* were also included among engagement gifts from the groom to the bride's family and were often elaborately decorated.



*Kueh Kaswi*



*Ondeh-Ondeh*

*Kueh Kueh* played an important role in Peranakan culture. The skill of making them was so highly prized in the community that a young girl with a talent for making the best *kueh* was often considered a prime candidate for marriage. The Peranakans also observed some taboos when they prepared their *kueh*. In a memoir written by her daughter (*A Nonya Mosaic – my Mother's Childhood* by Gwee Thian Hock), a young nyonya recounted that she had heard

I personally get my *kueh kueh* fix when I visit Malacca. I am a big fan especially of the *ondeh-ondeh* sold in 'Nancy's Kitchen', a family-owned Peranakan restaurant in Malacca. I make it a point to buy some every time I'm there, that is, if I get to the restaurant early enough.

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**Dinesh Sathisan** is a weekend volunteer docent at the Peranakan Museum. He has a massive sweet tooth and adores Peranakan *kueh kueh*!

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Photos by Gisella Harrold