

Delicious recipes to try with your book group

When I was researching the family histories of the early South Asian Americans, I had the good fortune to meet many warm and welcoming people who had greatly contributed to the community of the Imperial Valley. One of these was Norma Saikhon, who had been a farmer, Mayor of Brawley, and when I knew her, Imperial County Public Health Administrator. Norma died in 2018, and these grand titles do not do justice to the generous and approachable person she was—when I was asked in 2013 to write a piece for the Smithsonian Museum blog about the Asian/Latinx fusion food scene, I immediately reached out to Norma.

Norma's father immigrated from Punjab in 1916 and her mother grew up in Mexico before moving to the Valley in 1931. She told me that many of the South Asian men, laboring in work gangs to build the railroads in the western United States, continued to cook and eat Punjabi food communally. When they married and settled down to farming, they taught their wives how to cook South Asian food. Weekday meals were always of Mexican flavors, but Sunday dinners, wedding feasts, and funeral meals were always of the South Asian variety. The Mexican wives competed with each other, often very obviously, as to who made the best Punjabi food—especially chicken curry!

Despite the seeming similarity of some of the foods—such as Mexican tortillas and Punjabi parathas—Norma recalled how they were actually very different: tortillas were lighter fare and made with white flour; parathas required more labor and consisted of whole wheat. The families ate beans everyday—mixed with curry, mint and ginger on Punjabi days or boiled with onions, cheese or salsa on Mexican days. But some foods like Rice Pudding—also known as Arroz con Leche in Mexico and Kheer in South Asia, transcended cultures and continents and were known to all.

Here's a modern and easy recipe from Sarah Lohman that combines South Asian and Mexican flavors that you can make for your book group.

<http://www.fourpoundsflour.com/eight-flavors-punjabi-mexican-cuisine-and-the-roti-quesadilla>
Scroll all the way down to find a recipe for **Roti Quesadilla**.

Pair it with **Kingfisher Lager**, a favorite beer from India....

Try some **Rice Pudding** for dessert:

<https://www.thedeliciouscrescent.com/kheer-rice-pudding>

<https://www.mexicoinmykitchen.com/mexican-rice-pudding-arroz-con-leche>