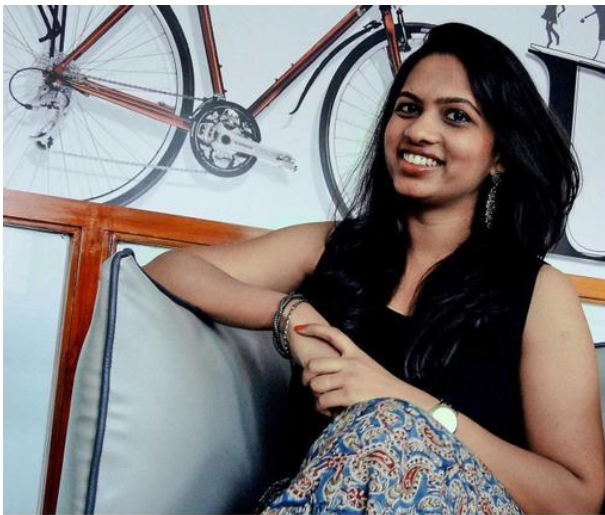


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A good serve indeed



You often hear of actors with a medical degree, writers with an engineering degree and artists with a law degree. At an age when your educational qualification doesn't necessarily have a bearing on your career path, Cindana Manickavel has used her degree in Public Relations to carve a niche for herself as a home baker.

An international tennis player, Cindana knew little else but her sport for most of her life. When she was forced to give it up for medical reasons, she got her Master's degree in Public Relations hoping to work in Sports Event Management.

Coming from a traditional Tamil family, where women are expected to wrap up work at 6 p.m., Cindana had to give up her plans for a career that would keep her on her toes well into the night. Consumed with the confusions and uncertainties about career opportunities that come with your early 20s, Cindana turned to baking for comfort.

At 23, Cindana decided that she no longer wanted to bake her cake and eat it too. Armed with a flair for marketing, Cindana started 'Sugar Monkey', a brand of cakes, cupcakes, cookies and dessert jars. In business, she realised, all you need are good friends and great networking. While two designer friends helped her design her brand and logo, one business-savvy friend explained costing and selling. A little bit of networking helped her desserts reach the right people and an interactive Facebook page made sure all the right people reached her. Everything else, she learned as she baked and six months in, she's baked over a thousand orders.

Cindana has found a unique positioning for her dessert jars by making them available at Maalgaadi, a fashion boutique in Besant Nagar, where her products are the only edible ones in the store. Sugar Monkey's desserts are often used as a return gift, meaning Cindana's name and dessert jars travel all around the city. She leaves her contact information on the lids, making it easy for anyone who is blown away by her desserts to call her and order for more.

"When I first started baking, my mother always said the kitchen looked like it had been ransacked by a monkey!" laughs Cindana when I ask her about her brand name. In the last six months, Cindana has not only become more organised, she has also diversified herself as a baker. Cindana bakes eggless cakes, vegan cakes, polka dotted cakes and bachelorette party cakes to meet the needs and sentiments of everyone in Chennai.

Despite the wide range of desserts she bakes, her Red Velvet jars have always been her speciality. "I came up with Red Velvet jars when I had to go on a trip and didn't have boxes big enough to carry cakes or muffins. So I decided to recycle some empty pickle jars lying around at home", says Cindana about the genesis of her signature product. Cindana's dessert jars remind us that you only need to love what you do; with a little bit of help and a lot of passion, there's nothing to stop you from making a career out of it. Besides, how could anyone resist Red Velvet cake that comes in a jar!