

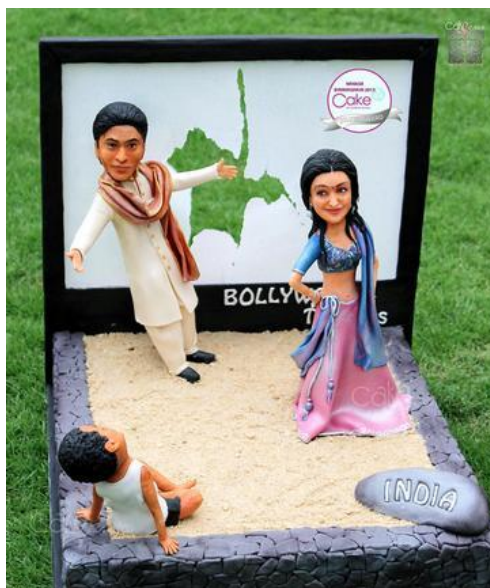
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The icing on the CAKE



Cake Designer Anna Mathew Vadayatt and right, the cake that won her the prize at Cake International Photos: By Special Arrangement



Anna Mathew Vadayatt's cakes are works of art. She was nominated for the Cake Oscars

It was a rose, a beautiful rose, in shades of pale pink. It was too beautiful to be a cake, which it was I learnt recently. The cake is called Gulab, Anna Mathew Vadayatt, who made the cake, tells me.

Equally impressive is Anna's take on the film *Jodhaa Akbar* which she made for an international collaboration of 45 cake and sugar artists. 'Be My Valentine Movie Nights' – an ode to love fashioned in cake was based on the bakers' favourite films, was uploaded on Valentine's Day this year. Anna's cake was among the daily top three.

The Kochi-based cake artist calls her enterprise 'Cake Canvas – Happiness in a Box'. As explanation she shows a video of her uncle opening 'happiness in a box', his birthday cake. The sexagenarian's face lights up on seeing a cake with his likeness crafted in fondant/sugar paste and ganache perched on a cake. "That's why I call it 'happiness in a box'."

A Fine-Arts post-graduate from **Stella Maris College**, Chennai, a topper and a gold medallist too, her heart was always in art. More inclined towards painting and drawing, she stumbled on to baking and 'sculpting' cakes in 2012. Soon she found her 'canvas', a non-traditional medium, she realised that she could sculpt – sugar sculpt.

Her skill as a sugar artist was validated at the Cake Oscars - Cake Masters Magazine Awards held at Birmingham (England) last November. She was nominated in the category for modelling excellence. The competition has around 12-14 categories with four participants in each category. The finalists are picked from thousands of nominations. She was the only Indian in her category. She didn't win, but the nomination itself is big deal. "I am happy to be nominated!"

Incidentally, she won the silver medal at Cake International, another event, held at Birmingham. A Bollywood inspired cake with a fondant Shahrukh Khan, no less, it was.

In 2014, she was the winner at an online competition, Pretty Witty Cakes (United Kingdom), for the people modelling competition. At the last Muziris Biennale, as part of the Malayalam Project, where each artist had to interpret a word in their artistic vocabulary, she baked a cake depicting her word, *bhraanthi* (mad woman). Visually striking, to the eye used to cutesy or pretty cakes, it is a shock to see a cake in shades of grey – a dark cake of sorts. One of the judges at the Cake Masters event complimented her *bhraanthi*. This cake justifies why she prefers the term artist to baker. She painstakingly sculpts each piece that becomes a cake, modelling the fondant she makes.

In fact, she confesses that the only cake she bakes, for her clients, is chocolate cake with white chocolate ganache icing. That is her tried, tested and loved recipe and she'd rather not take chances with the cake on someone's special day – a wedding, reception, baptism, birthday, anniversary and any other. "I don't want people to say that my cake doesn't taste as good as it looks."

Cake seems too simplistic a description for what Anna does. Her Kathakali cake for instance is a piece of art, too good to be eaten, so is the castle cake she baked for a client, an exact replica of one in Portugal. For this cake she referred images online cutting cakes to shape and putting the pieces together like building blocks.

The payoff is worth the effort, she says. For instance, the shock on the faces of the to-be married couple when they came to collect the almost two foot high Kathakali cake is something she will not forget. She remembers many such reactions.

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