



Re-defining cuisine with Mira Manek

The jet-setting, yoga-practicing, health-retreat-hosting author of cookbook *Saffron Soul*, Mira Manek, is determined to give Indian food a total facelift, accenting the traditional recipes passed down from her mother and grandmother with a wholesome yet contemporary twist. *Yogalife* talks to her.

What do spices mean to you?

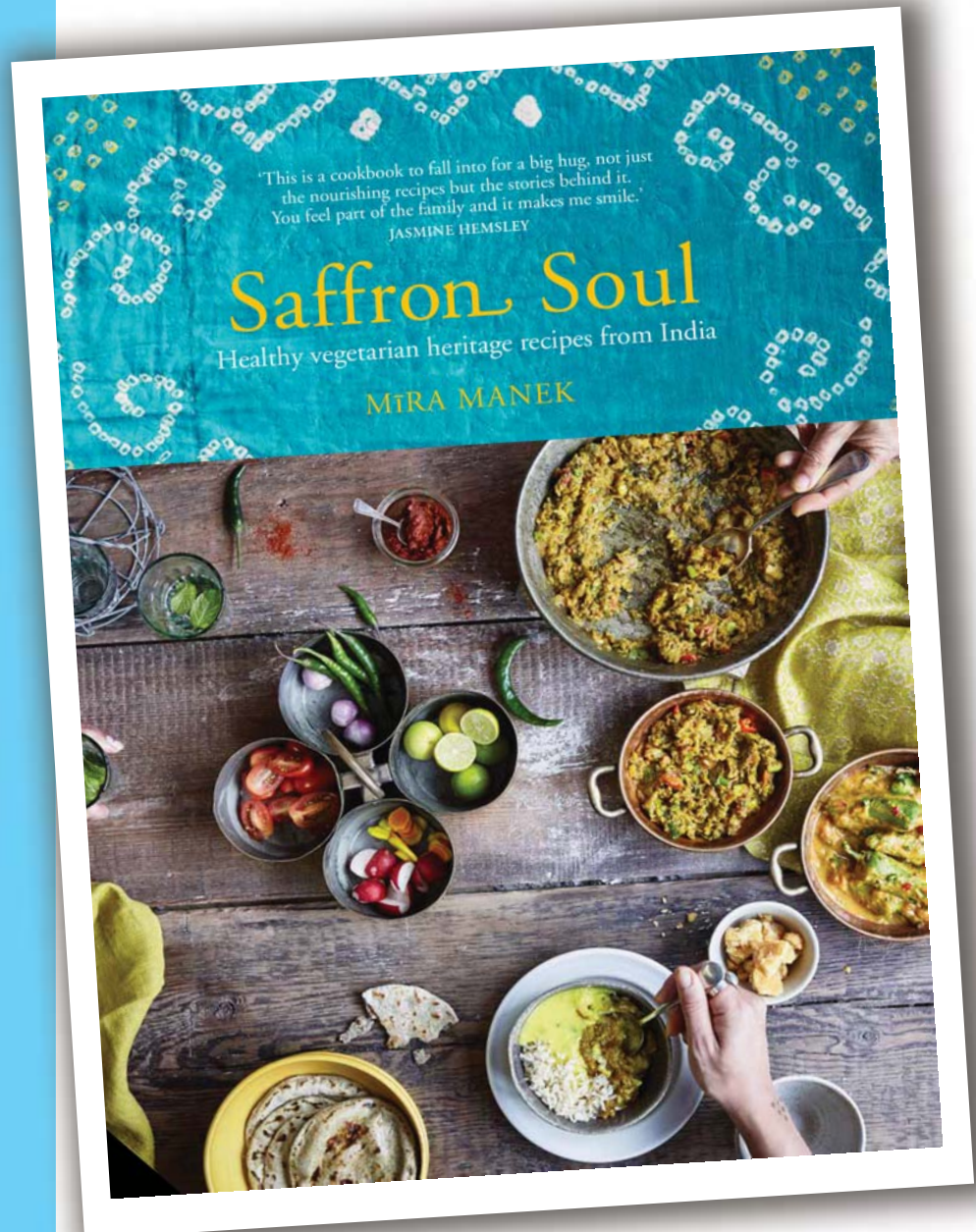
Flavour, life, oomph! They literally bring vegetables to life and make healthy food a lot more fun, interesting and appealing. From cinnamon and turmeric to cumin and chilli, it's all super important – both in everyday food and drink, and especially when cooking Indian.

It is very important to know spices to use them in the right way. Do you have any tips? In a basic way, yes, for example not overdoing turmeric powder in a curry, even though you can put a lot more of it in your hot water lemon and honey drink. But once you know those basics, you can really experiment. So following recipes to start with and then, once you understand the flavours a little and realise what you like, then go with your instinct.

What is your idea of a healthy meal? It's all about balance, trying to eat all the food groups and eating a rainbow of colours – greens and vegetables, some sort of grain (quinoa, millet, barley, rice), some nuts perhaps or avocado for good fat, some form of protein (chick-peas, beans, lentils, eggs or meat if you're not vegan or vegetarian).

What is always there in your kitchen larder? All the spices, quinoa, beans, black rice, coconut oil and olive oil, protein powder, spirulina, hemp powder, cacao powder.

What are your top spices that are a must use for everyday cooking? Cinnamon, turmeric, cumin seeds and cumin powder, black pepper, mustard seeds. Secondary are coriander powder, garam masala mix, red chilli powder, paprika.



What is your favourite go-to meal at any time of the day?

In winter, I'm obsessed with porridge, but I mix in some chia seeds, flax seeds, pumpkin and sunflower seeds, and I often grate some courgette into it! I also love the Chilli Kick Grain Bowl from my book *Saffron Soul* – it's super simple and I usually have quinoa ready boiled in my fridge. The yoghurt chutney for this bowl is my absolutely favourite. And lastly, it's just simple – you can add anything you want to it.

Your favourite under 10-minute recipes for millennials on the move?

Keep a few things ready and prepped in the fridge eg boiled quinoa, brown rice or black rice, boiled or roasted sweet potato cubes, chopped spinach or kale, grilled or tossed tofu pieces, and a coriander cashew dressing (or any dressing). Then all you have to do is put together different ingredients in a bowl and create your own Buddha bowl when you're hungry, adding in some beans or chickpeas and anything else that you like!

Your tips to make a few basic Indian dishes healthier?

Indian food is generally very healthy – just cut out the fried bits, anything too sweet and make a large filled salad alongside your curry meal, so that you're also having something fresh, vibrant and light!

Why do yoga and food go together so well? Can you comment on eating according to your Dosha?

Yoga is like an external and internal massage, stretching and movement we all need, increasing flexibility, improving our breath and therefore our life.

Yoga and food go hand in hand to improving our wellbeing and health.

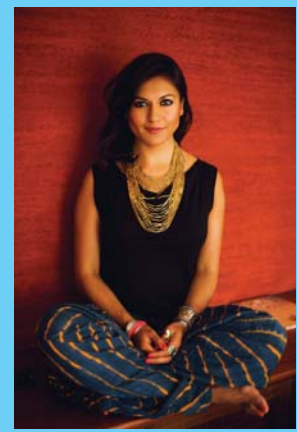
My own journey back to healthfulness started with yoga and then moved to eating well again, going back to my roots, the home cooked food that I grew up eating and then learning all this from my grandmother and mother.

Your comments on the new trend of various diets like gluten free, paleo, vegan etc.

I'm glad that there has been a real shift from a diet-based culture to a balance-based life in the past few years. The language has certainly changed, which is great, because I suffered as a teenager by being sucked into diets which did not necessarily champion fresh foods and therefore nutrition was not even part of my vocabulary.

As for gluten free, this is all very personal, to do with each person's needs, intolerances and allergies, and vegan may be for moral and other reasons.

This is all fine, but I would say that don't cut out food groups for no reason – so there's no need to go gluten free without having an allergy or intolerance. If you know your dosha according to Ayurveda, ideally from seeing an Ayurvedic practitioner, eating foods that work for your dosha is probably one of the best ways of improving your diet and health, designed specifically for your own body.



Mira Manek

Through her dishes such as beet-root coconut curry, masala-grilled aubergine, and saffron-lime cheese-cake, Manek is all about making Indian spices and seasonings more accessible to all. Over in her hometown of London, you'll even spot her delicious creations at the likes of *Raw Press* and *Detox Kitchen*. She has just launched a series of *Soulful* events, including two *Soulful* retreats, one in Oxfordshire UK this May and another in the beautiful palace RAAS Devigarh in Udaipur, Rajasthan this September! Mira is collaborating with international yoga teachers on these retreats, combining different elements from yoga and meditation to food and discussion to curate truly wholesome and soulful retreats.

Find out more about these on miramanek.com/retreats

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