

Discovering Chettinad In Toronto

By Binoy Thomas

So okay, like Shania Twain sings, you're hot and you're an Indian restaurant. That doesn't impress me much! But if you're as fussy as Ms Twain, then you're ready for Anjappar, the Chettinad style restaurant that has just added some never-before flavour to the Scarborough air. A dream project by two friends from back in Dubai, Mark Swaminathan and Pradeep T, Anjappar is the first to offer the famed Chettinad style cuisine anywhere in North America.

Situated on a quiet stand-alone facility with plenty of parking close to the Eglinton/Markham Rd intersection, Anjappar is already the talk of the Scarborough town.

“Even on the Sunday when GTA was under extremely winter white out conditions, we had a crowd,” says the soft-spoken Mark rather proudly.

Right now the people that are streaming in to this spacious, warmly-appointed eatery are the old hands at Chettinad food, they know already what it tastes like, and are willing to test Anjappar for its authenticity. Yes, it's authentic. Why not? The cooks, all four of them, and even the restaurant and the food supervisors, are trained in the headquarters of Anjappar chain of hotels in Chennai, India, before they arrive in Toronto. Psst...the secret ingredients too come in – exclusive to Anjappar in Toronto.

So what is this fuss about? Is it just another nice and spicy eating place? It is that and much more. To begin with, a little history on the Chettinad style of cooking itself, which is, unlike the very famous Jayalalitha, is not all that well-known in the rest of India or among the Diaspora.

Not for long though. Because Chettinad is the hot new flavour in India, not just as a cuisine, but also as a favourite tourist destination for domestic travellers. Chettinad is the place where the community known as Chettiars comes from originally. And this community of merchants traces back their history to the ancient Chola Empire when they traded precious stones and other such exotic items across the seas of South East Asia.

Thanks to the rich and diverse history, their cuisine came to reflect the flavour of several territories, making it a delicious whole. The connoisseur can detect the scents and tastes from as far as Burma, Malaysia, to South India including some aspects of the Malabar style of cooking. Chettinad style is among the rare authentic non-vegetarian style of cooking in the State of Tamil Nadu.

Enough of history. Let's tuck right in. Start with the familiar chicken pakoras, or Chicken lollipop, or be adventurous and find out what's Chicken 65? Okay, (that's with this Shania line), so you're into veggie? Just don't miss their Cauliflower 65, flowerettes of fresh cauliflower marinated in yoghurt and special masala and deep-fried, Yummy!

Anjappar has all the regular stuff that you and me are used to. From the tandoor, Tandoori chicken, tangadi kabab or fish tikka etc and the breads to go with it like Butter

Nan, Stuffed Kulcha or plain roti. But that's not quite what you are there for. It's strongly recommended that you turn your attention to the Chettinad specialty. Of course, some names might seem a little strange, but go ahead and take a chance if you are really looking for something different. Suraputtu, for example, is shart meat blended with egg and scrambled. You have a choice of crab and prawns and fish. On the other hand, if your stomach is not used to the sea, then stick to the traditional chicken-mutton route, all strictly halal of course.

There are many chicken dishes, but try either the Special Anjappar Chicken Masala or the Chettinad Chicken. That's our recommendation. In Mutton, the very first item is perhaps the best Mutton Sukka Varuval – tender cuts of lamb marinated in crushed peppercorns fried with chopped onions and curry leaves. And if you're the mutton purist, then Mutton Masala that is mutton fried with peppercorns and curry leaves. Now you need a bread to dip into them, right? Of course, you can be faithful and order a roti. But if you're not falling off the cholesterol chart, then why not try the melt-in-the-mouth Ceylon Egg Parotta?

Of course, you know I am keeping the best for the last – the Chettinad biryanis. They are a class act- possibly due to the aromas that it has absorbed over the centuries when Chettinad style of cooking developed. Whether you order Vegetarian, Mutton, Chicken or even Fish or Prawn, they all come in traditional kadhais carrying generous portions that won't disappoint you. And the prices, oh, you'll love that too. Average price of a dish from \$7 to \$8. If you're driving from the West end, you can grumble about the traffic and the gas, but you'll drive back a happy camper!

And yes, one more thing, Chettinad is hot, and don't tell them to make it bland. If it's not hot, it's not Chettinad.