

Unraveling culinary secrets of Chettians

By Somasiri Munasinghe

Have you ever heard of chicken rasam? Being a man not yet fully exposed to the mindboggling array of ethnic cuisine adorning the heart of ethnic diversity in Toronto, I had not heard of such a thing...not until Saturday night when I happened to be an uninvited guest at the opening of the Anjappar Chettinad Restaurant in Scarborough.

Rasam, with its fiery concoction of spices, and leaves is a perfect remedy for a minor stomach ailments as we all know, and the piece of chicken performed an extra role of finetuning my taste-buds.

The array of gourmet delicacies was as surprising the chicken rasam and I dragged a busy-looking Mark Swaminathan, a partner of the restaurant, to a corner and asked him what all this meant...Anjappar Chettinad!

Chettinad is a style of cooking, according to him, pioneered by the chettiyars who travel a lot to foreign countries on business. Being avid travelers had its disadvantages. One was that they missed their Southern Indian food. They found a solution. The chettiyars who were renowned for their innovative skills in business did not lag behind when it came to food. They borrowed from other types of Asian cooking existing in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Burma and Indonesia and came out with their own unique style known as Chettinad, now a jewel in the Indian crown of gourmet cooking.

Anjappar, a chettiyar himself, was the founder of the Anjappar Chettinad Restaurants in 1965. Many franchises had been opened and are running successfully in Chennai (Madras). The Anjappar group has gone international in recent years and franchises had been opened in Dubai, Malaysia, US and now in Canada.

According to Mark, his outlet is the first Chettinad restaurant to open in Toronto and has plans to open another two in Mississauga area.

Mark says that two people can have a good, tasty, quality meal cooked by Chettinad chefs specially flown from South India for about \$20. Any kind of wine, beer or other beverage of your choice to wash down the spicy mouthfuls are also available.

The restaurant, according to Mark has an obsession for quality to maintain the traditional style of Chettinad cooking.

A Sri Lankan insurance man, who frequents Madras often, was heard saying at the restaurant that in South India people had to wait in a big line up to get into a Chettinad joint.

Fortunately there were no huge lineups that day. And I am still thinking that spicy, hot, chicken rasam as windchill has dipped below – 20s.

For more details log on to www.anjappartoronto.com.