

As you may recall from my column in November of 2007, I had mentioned that I would soon be leaving for the homeland. However, circumstances changed and I had to rush to Delhi earlier than expected and was unable to write the column for December. My good friend Vish was kind enough to step in and write it and did an awesome job with it. I had mentioned that I would be bringing my observations back with me and here is some of what I got from *desh* and the drinking habits of the *desis* there.

I hooked up with a cousin of mine after a long time and we went to this private, by invitation only, art exhibition and auction. The booze selection was scotch, vodka, rum, gin and wine. What surprised me is that all the *daru* was imported and the consumption of hard liquor was lower than that of red wine. This was a huge change from the older drinking patterns. Indian wines as well as imported wines (from all over the world) flowed freely and were the preferred choice of the evening. The art exhibition boasted art work provided by local artists. Prices ranged from Rs. 37K to Rs. 12 lakhs (1.2 million dollars).

An interesting observation that I made was that the who's who of Delhi have this constant urge to show off. They talk the talk and walk the walk of the most happening movers and shakers in town!

At another time, I had the opportunity to get my dad, who had been laid up in bed for over a month, out to the most exclusive club in Delhi (Gymkhana). Gymkhana Club is right next to the Prime Minister's house and the average wait to become a member here is over a 100 years (no exaggeration!) because of their highly rigorous selection process. During the day, consumption of beer (**Kingfisher** is still the beer of choice which is also available in cans now) and **Bloody Mary** is



very high. The 8 bartenders on duty were not able to keep up with the steady demand. Bloody Mary is served without the signature celery stick and the salt rim is larger and is made of coarser salt as compared to the one available in the US of A. The other difference is that this cocktail in *desh* is a lot spicier. After talking to the bartender, the only difference in the preparation is that the *desi* Bloody Mary is served with a spoonful of salt, pepper, rock salt and chilli mixture which is put into the glass after the salt rim and before the other ingredients, tomato juice, Tabasco, vodka and Worcestershire sauce, are added. This pre-made mixture added a real nice kick to the drink.

**Old Monk**, the preferred dark rum for decades, (I did manage to get two bottles back) has been replaced by **Contessa** dark rum. Most people there drink rum with water as opposed to the signature rum and coke. **Jack Daniels** is abundantly available and has eaten into the huge dark rum market.

I did not get the chance to go to any pubs or bars but I did hear that they are all packed to the hilt at

all times of the day. Even the smaller cities like Amritsar and Raipur have any number of these pubs and it is becoming very socially acceptable to go and grab a drink or two during the day (think Martini lunches in corporate America). These establishments are generally open until 1 AM but that time is flexible, like so many other things in India and these watering holes can be kept open till the time you're willing to grease the wheels.

One disturbing trend that I saw was that a lot of people make and take their drinks while driving. Proper bars are set up in the trunks of cars or supplies are taken into the car so that drinks can be made while they navigate the traffic of Delhi. The local police has started using breathalyzers and different check points are set up all over the capital to catch and limit drunk driving.

All in all, *daru* and *daru baaz* still reign supreme and all have a *balle balle* of a time even though some of their habits and tastes have changed with time. We are still a nation of big talkers, big drinkers, big dreamers and live our lives king size.

*Balle balle* until next time when I will share some more *desi daru* recipes with you.

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## Restaurant Review: Cilantro Indian Cuisine

By: Team Masala



**Jay Chaudhary & Sanju Rajak** are the two bright, young owners of **Cilantro Indian Cuisine**. **Sanju** runs the Cilantro location in Jacksonville and **Jay** is the man in charge of the location in Tampa. They are both gifted with great enthusiasm and drive to get their restaurants noticed and noticed in the right way - for the cuisine.

Both Jay and Sanju moved to the US in 2003 after having completed a hotel management degree from PUSA institute in New Delhi and having worked in establishments like Le Meridian and Olive Bar & Kitchen. They came with a plan - to bring Indian food to the US.

When they first arrived here, they realized that they had to spend some time in learning how business is done in this country. They worked at a friend's restaurant in Melbourne to learn the ropes and finally opened their first location in Jacksonville in 2006. The Jacksonville Cilantro received the Best of 2006 Award from Florida Times Union and Folio Weekly. Cilantro opened its doors to Tampa in October of 2007.

Some of the Team Masala crew recently had the opportunity to visit this brand new restaurant. We had heard rave reviews and considering that Cilantro has opened just a few months ago, we thought it was worth a visit.

The first thing that strikes you as you walk in is that this is not a badly done up place. The lobby



and bar area are done up elegantly and the whole restaurant lends an atmosphere of space coupled with quiet good taste.

We ordered off the menu as quickly as possible as the kitchen was about to close. *Tandoori Mixed Grill*, *Palak Paneer*, *Chicken Tikka Masala*, *Doi Murg* and *Goat Korma* were some of the items we ordered along with *naan*. We dug in to the delectable array of food and couldn't help raving ourselves at the flavor and pure "deliciousness" of the food. Everything was lip smacking good and regrettably, we had absolutely no room left for dessert. The general consensus was, "this food is amazing".

The wait staff is attentive and so is Jay. We had him visit our table a couple of times to ensure that everything was fine and we saw him do the same with his other guests as well. The restaurant was packed even at that late hour.

In conversation with Jay, we had him highlight some of his signature and most popular dishes. *Chicken Lollypops*, *Vegetable Malai Kofta*, *Paneer Khurchan* and *Goat Korma* were some items that rolled off his tongue as the all time favorites in his restaurant. Amongst the desserts, *Rasmalai* and *Rabadi with Jalebi* seem to be runaway hits, the latter being available only in catered events. Jay went on to add, "we will be starting a regional buffet soon - different States from India will be featured every Sunday and we will carry food that is special to that State."

The lunch buffet at the restaurant is available Monday - Friday, 11:30AM - 2:30PM and Saturdays and Sundays, 12:00PM - 3:00PM. Dinner timings are Monday - Sunday, 5PM - 10:30PM. Cilantro is located at 11009 N. 56th St. in Tampa and 9825-6 San Jose Blvd. in Jacksonville. The Tampa number is 813-983-8220 and the Jacksonville number is 904-262-9577. Website is [www.CilantroJax.com](http://www.CilantroJax.com). Cilantro does catering as well.