

Daru Ka Nasha

Kerala - This is how we Roll!

By: Javid Lateef

I am taking a break from my 'traditional' role as a sportswriter and am going to delve into Mr. Jain's territory of alcohol related musings. First of all, I am a Malayali (Mallu), which means I hail from the state of Kerala, and I am going to try and touch upon the drinking habits of my fair state.

Mallus spent more money on liquor last year than they did on rice!!! Any one who knows how much south Indians love rice should be shocked by this. Drinking has been a socially accepted pass time in Kerala for generations now. The funny thing is that ALL the liquor that is consumed is sold through Government Agencies (yes, even the Johnnie Walker that we seem to consume in gallons). What is not regulated to such an extent is *Kallu*.

Before we go further, for people who have no idea what *kallu* is and how *kallu* is made, a short course on *kallu* preparation! Locate a palm tree or a coconut tree which is just giving out the kernel branches i.e. the stage before the flowering. Climb the tree; slit the branches with a sharp blade and you will get liquid oozing out of it, few drops a minute. Collect this liquid in a container, just hang it there and pick it up after 9 - 10 hours. This liquid is actually the *kallu*. If you had coated the inner walls of the container in which you are collecting the liquid with lime, whatever you collect be-

comes *pathini* which is sweet tasting and so very good for health.

If you don't rub the container's inner walls of the container with lime, the liquid starts fermenting as soon as it starts collecting and in around 6 - 8 hours, it ferments to about 4 - 6 % alcohol (a bit stronger than beer and becomes *kallu*.) *Kallu*, by and far, is the healthiest liquor drink and is 100% natural, contains lots of minerals and cools down the body. The method of *kallu* preparation is easy and cheap, and with so many coconut trees in Kerala, (I am sure everyone's backyard has at least one coconut tree), we are wasting such a healthy free and natural resource to make booze! *Kallu* is not just used as a drink. It is also added to the *Appam* (bowl-shaped thin pancakes made from fermented rice flour) to ferment the batter.

Kallu is consumed by most drinkers in Kerala, regardless of economic status, but the wealthier are more picky drinkers. *Mallus* (especially my *Mallu* Christian pals, whom we call *Achayans*), are predominantly Scotch and

Brandy drinkers. Johnnie Walker and Chivas Regal used to be the choice for Scotch and the Brandy drinkers usually stuck to the Indian brands. Nowadays, people have become more discerning, and the Single Highland Malt seems to be a status symbol. Beer and wine are also consumed in vast quantities in Kerala. Wine is made in-house at a lot of Christian homes.

What is really amazing about our drinking is that we actually have finger foods that we enjoy with our drinks. Beef Fry, Shrimp *Thoren* (Shrimp, stir fried with coconut) and pickle (yes... *achar!*).

So the next time any of you folks are in my neck of the woods, please try to find a good *Kallu* shop (there are some excellent ones around Kottayam), park yourself there, enjoy some *Kallu* and the food that they offer, which is usually freshly caught fish and *kappa* (tapioca) and just enjoy the hospitality. Signing off for now....

Write to darukanasha@citymasala.com with any questions or comments.

Restaurant Review: Saffron Indian Cuisine

By: Team Masala

"Savor the exotic flavors and subtle tastes of India's finest cuisine rooted in the rich heritage of India. Enjoy an authentic Indian dining experience that will leave your taste buds wanting more. Best of all,

our prices are very reasonable." So goes the advertisement for **Saffron Indian Cuisine**, a brand new restaurant in New Tampa. On sampling the food, you will find that the words are accurate and this restaurant is definitely an asset in the area.

Sunita Chheda, the owner of Saffron, was born and brought up in Bombay. *"I have 7 siblings, my dad was a chef, and everybody in my family loves to cook. I started cooking when I was ten and cooking is really in my blood."* Sunita has 2 boys, oldest one is in high school and the young one is 9 and is in the 4th grade. Her boys are with her husband in India at this time. *"I initially wanted to open a restaurant in Orlando. I bought a deli franchise*

which did not open up in the end. I have family living in Tampa and when I found this place, I decided to open Saffron right here. This is the first restaurant I have ever owned. There are no Indian restaurants around here so I am hoping Saffron will draw a lot of attention."

Amongst some of the unusual items on the menu, the appetizers consist of *samosa chaat* and *kathi kabab* roll, the main course has items such as *tandoori* shrimp and of course, the most popular *tandoori* chicken. There is also chicken *vindaloo* as well as *xacuti* (kshakuti) – a coconut based preparation made with chicken, lamb or goat. The menu also offers *Goan* fish curry.

Saffron's selection of *biryani* is fast becoming quite famous and you can choose from chicken or goat *biryani*. The *biryani* is even offered in the buffet selection on Saturdays and Sundays. Sunita says that her *biryani* has become so famous already that people drive for 2 hours to partake of it!

Customer feedback so far has put *chicken tikka masala* and *butter chicken* amongst the top dishes. The *butter chicken* is especially popular because of the way it is prepared and how the chicken is

shredded.

To bring a delicious meal to a perfect end, you do need a good selection of desserts. Saffron offers a seasonal cream dessert which is fresh fruit with cream. *"We make our own pistachio kulfi and mango ice cream. Our gajar halwa is hugely popular. We don't buy any desserts - they are all made here."*

Saffron is closed on Mondays and is open Tuesdays to Fridays from 11.30 AM to 2.30 PM for lunch and from 5 PM - 10 PM for dinner. The timings on Saturdays and Sundays are from 5 PM - 10 PM.

The restaurant offers catering services for weddings, parties, get-togethers, graduation ceremonies, engagement parties - basically any catering need you may have. Specific kind of food can also be prepared according to special requirements.

Saffron is affiliated with www.themealcab.com, if you are interested in deliveries. The restaurant is located on 10044 Cross Creek Blvd in Tampa and the phone number is 813-600-3315.