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A moveable feast from Big Rajah

By STEPHEN NG | streets@nst.com.my[Google +](#) [0 comments](#)

KINGLY REPAST: Allow Big Rajah Food Caterers to summon up a royal treat for you and your guests

KUALA LUMPUR: THE maharajahs of India may be long gone, but their legendary feasts may still be savoured today.

Thanks to the Indian-born Rossari Xavier, and her late husband, J.J. Xavier, Big Rajah Food Caterers in Petaling Jaya has been serving meticulously-prepared traditional Indian food.

Rossari, executive chef Thamizhmaran Narayanan and sous chef de cuisine Sahubar Sadique Jamal Mohamed can cater for big official functions with up to 30,000 guests -- without compromising on the quality of the food.

Big Rajah also provides canopies, tents, furniture and fixtures, creative decor, dome services and a whole series of personalised settings to make the event a memorable one for the host as well as the guests.

As for attention to detail, it even offers cupcakes in colours to match the theme of the occasion.

The invitation to sample Big Rajah's finest on a Sunday was accepted with alacrity.

I was drawn to the briyani, a favourite dish of mine. Hyderabad is known for its mutton briyani, and over here, Thamizhmaran, 46, who hails from South India, has chosen to use the high quality Moghul long grain briyani rice.

"The rice is cooked with boiled mutton cubes, dried and ground spices such as ginger and cloves, fresh mint leaves, onions, fresh yoghurt, ghee and some garam masala," he explained.

As we moved on to a discourse on the chef's mutton Mysore, who should walk in but the "Big Rajah" himself.

"This is John William Xavier, our chief executive officer. We all call him the Big Rajah.

"But back to the mutton Mysore, the mutton is first cut into cubes before it is added to the pot along with dried spices, meat curry powder, ground ginger sliced onions and tomatoes, curry leaves, cooking oil and some salt."

In between mouthfuls of the Mysore mutton and the briyani, I enjoyed another favourite of mine since primary school days -- the achar. It sounded easy enough to make -- julienned cucumber, carrot, diced pineapple and young ginger are tossed with fresh red chillies that has been deseeded and cut into strips, shallots, pounded roasted groundnuts, sugar, chilli paste, turmeric powder, vinegar, oil and salt to taste.

Having tasted the masala chicken, I next tried the Big Rajah's chicken coriander masala.



Navarathan chicken kurma



Vegetable dhalcha.



Executive chef Thamizhmaran Narayanan is from South India.

John supplied the ingredients list: "The chicken masala is prepared using chicken pieces cooked with dried spices, chilli powder, ground ginger, tomato puree, sliced onions and coriander leaves."

Another interesting dish was the wing tip garlic prawns. "The fresh prawns are peeled and de-veined with their tails intact before they go into the frying pan with ground paste of ginger, garlic, green chilies and onion," Thamizhmaran said.

"Dried cinnamon, cloves or star anise are then added, along with tomatoes, curry leaves and finely-sliced onions. Garam Masala is added to taste."

Next up was the Navarathan chicken kurma.

"Cinnamon, star anise, cardamom and cloves are added to the chicken pieces and cooked with cashew nuts and candlenut paste," said Thamizhmaran.

"We then add kurma powder, ground ginger, sliced onions, tomatoes and curry leaves. Finally, we pour in coconut cream and lemon juice together with some ghee and cooking oil."

To complement the meat dishes were three vegetable dishes.

The cucumber and tomato raita is prepared by first grating the cucumber, then adding in finely chopped tomatoes and coriander leaves, finely sliced onions and green chili, followed by yoghurt and salt to taste.

For the vegetable dalcha, lentils are boiled with turmeric powder. Once the lentils are cooked, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots and brinjals are added and boiled until cooked. Sauteed onions, ginger, garlic, fresh chilies, curry leaves, mustard seeds, cumin seeds and tamarind paste are added to the boiled vegetables and lentils with salt to taste.

The saffron mixed vegetables is another vegetarian dish of diced boiled potatoes fried with cauliflower, carrot, French beans, sliced onions, garlic, ginger, ground coconut and sliced onions. Some meat curry powder, turmeric powder and chili powder are added.

Finally, even with a full tummy, the kulfi ice cream is a beautiful treat. "In India, kulfi ice cream is something that even adults enjoy," said John.

"Fresh milk is boiled and then sugar, essence, food colourings and some almond or cashew nut paste are added. Once the mixture is cooled, it is poured into trays of steel cups in the specially imported kulfi ice cream machine with added nuts and frozen."

It is amazing to learn that Big Rajah started as a small catering house some 40 years ago. It was founded by the late J.J. Xavier, and said to be Malaysia's first Indian catering house. Xavier was, in fact, named the Pioneering Father of Food Caterers by the Indian Food Catering Association.

John is the son, and if he is the Big Rajah, then the mother must be the Maharani, because she is the woman behind two successful men!

Big Rajah Food Caterers Sdn Bhd is at Lot 13509, Jalan Jenjarom (Jalan SS23/10), Taman SEA, Petaling Jaya. For details, call 03-7880 2266.



Mutton mysore Rajah



Wing tip garlic prawns