

FOOD

South of the border



Reji Varghese

APRIL 08, 2016 16:44 IST

UPDATED: OCTOBER 18, 2016 12:47 IST

REJI VARGHESE unravels the story of the unique 'border parotta' and finds out why it is unlike any of its counterparts

When a friend asked, “Shall we try border parotta for dinner?” I was intrigued. I had heard of Kerala, Malabar and Ceylon parotta, but never this, so I checked, and sure enough, I had heard right.

So, we headed out to a restaurant on G. N. Chetty Road; the English signboard read Border Rahmath Kadai and the Tamil one had “Courtallam” prefixed to this. There’s usually an interesting story behind an unusual name, and I intended to find out what it was. There was a bit of a wait, because the place was packed at 9 p.m. The decor was basic as was the menu; it had five categories, including *naattukozhi*, mutton, *kaadai*, biryani and egg specials.

The waiter who served us was friendly and we chatted, asking about the story behind the strange name. The story came in bits and pieces, between the laying out of the banana leaves, serving the freshly-made hot parottas, and the liberal ladles of the reddish *salna* (chicken gravy) that they are famous for. Another speciality, the *naattu kozhi* pepper fry, was brought around in a big steel vessel, and anyone who wanted a piece just needed to gesture to the waiter. Each time he came by our table, the story became clearer.

The story of the border parotta is intertwined with the story of a road that winds between Punnaloor in Kerala and Shenkottai in Tamil Nadu. As this road snakes down the Western Ghats, one of the first villages it reaches on the Tamil Nadu side is Piranoor. Till 1956, there was a toll gate in the village, signifying the border between Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and the place soon came to be known (and is still referred to) as just “Border”. It became a trading post between the two states and a pit stop for lorry crew and busloads of travellers, and a number of parotta stalls started proliferating in the area. Years later, when Courtallam, which is just three km away, became a popular tourist destination, more people flocked to “Border” as well. But among a host of stalls, one that had visitors throughout the year was Rahmath Parotta Kadai. That small stall, in the last 45 years, has gone on to become a tourist attraction by itself.

At the Chennai branch, we spoke to Raja Mohammed, grandson of the founder Mohammed Hassan, who says, “We use only country chicken, and the dishes are prepared in fresh coconut oil and pepper which we source from Kerala. All our masalas are made at home and our recipes are a family secret. These masalas are sent to Chennai every week, and I personally mix them in the required ratio and give it to our cooks, all of whom are from our hometown too.”

Though there were many interestingly-named items on the menu, like Gun Chicken and Ding Dong Eggs, we stuck to their specialities; the shredded pepper chicken was the standout dish of the night.

In the food industry, there’s an oft-quoted statistic that over 60 per cent of restaurants shut down in their first year of operation and 80 per cent within five. To survive and thrive for 45 years is a testimony to the food at Border Rahmath Kadai. This Chennai outlet, their only one outside Courtallam, was opened on March 10 without much fanfare, but the place is already packed with people from all walks of life. As Raja Mohammed says, “We’ve not advertised. This place has been open for less than a month, and we’ve had ministers, film personalities and other VIPs coming in for a meal.” As we left, the parking lot – with BMWs and Mercedes parked alongside motorbikes, scooters and mopeds – justified Raja Mohammed’s statement.

A meal for two costs Rs. 600.

Address: 67, G. N. Chetty Road, T. Nagar

Printable version | Nov 13, 2018 12:49:03 PM |

<https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/Food/South-of-the-border/article14226594.ece>

© The Hindu