

THE RELUCTANT GOURMET

Peppered with history

SHONALI MUTHALALY

Chaat lovers rejoice, the famed Kailash Parbat comes to town soon

Photo: M. Vedhan



YUMMY DELIGHTS Dishes from Kailash Parbat

It's the year 1940. The Mulchandani brothers, with their passion for pani puri, have set up a little kiosk on Bans Road in Karachi. It becomes immensely popular. Then, in 1947 Partition forces them to make a tough decision. They have to flee to India and can't carry much. So they're forced to choose between personal valuables and cooking utensils. They take the utensils. “

I personally feel that was right choice!” smiles Kamlesh Mulchandani, grandson of one of the two brothers, at the launch of their 11th outlet more than 60 years later. He's three generations away from the original chaat shop. He's also a graduate from the prestigious Indian Institute of Hotel Management in Aurangabad. Yet Kamlesh and his cousins still spend much of their time ensuring that this now slick, modern, high-profile chain continues to make pani puri that's true to those flavours concocted decades ago on Bans Road.

We get a sneak peek into their glossy new outlet on Harrington Road, thanks to a charity event organised by successful city restaurateur M. Mahadevan, who has tied up with Kailash Parbat for their first foray into South India. Waiters scurry past balancing trays piled high with fragrant golden-brown ragda patties, the brand's signature dish. As everyone exults in the deliciously fluffy mashed potato, crisp outside and topped with tangy tamarind chutney, the auction is kicked off, raising proceeds for The Tanker Foundation, which supports underprivileged kidney patients.

In the tradition of friendly chaat shops, Chennai's Kailash Parbat feels small, noisy and busy although it's been designed to hold about 95 people with two levels — the main and a mezzanine. They have a private dining area for about 15 people, though it really is more fun to sit in the middle of all the mayhem, where you can watch inflated baturas busily bustle past and knock elbows with waiters singing praises to the KP chaat, an overly sweet concoction made with thick, sugary curd, sweet corn and the usual chaat fixings.

Although items such as the quirky corn baskets are new, Kailash Parbat still has a staple menu that hasn't changed much since its first official outlet in Bombay at Azad Maidan Road in 1952. However, it was Colaba outlet that really made them famous. Even now, people spill out of this cheerfully crowded space, gleefully tucking into fudgy kaju katlis, crisp jelebis and juicy gulab jamuns.

Talking of how different his method of functioning is, compared to his father and grandfather, Kamlesh says, "In fifty years, they opened five outlets. My generation has, in five years, opened 11 outlets. We have central kitchens. And a training centre for the cooks." Fortunately, some things are sacred. Recipes haven't changed, and neither have the ingredients.

This tradition of taste is thanks to their 150 cooks, most of whom have worked with the Mulchandanis for decades. Of these, about 16 are currently in Chennai, working on their 110-item menu. The edge Kailash Parbat seems to have over most Chennai chaat shops is earnest authenticity. basic masalas are Sindhi and the food's not just packed off with a half-hearted dusting of chaat masala, chilli powder and semi-soggy sev. For people looking for something funky there's batura in different flavours, from kasuri methi to cheese.

Kailash Parbat is at No 9, Harrington Road, Chetpet above French Loaf and Maple Leaf. It will open in about a week. Call 43510601 for details.

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*Anitha Parthasarthy
Silex Technologies, India
www.silex.co.in*