

A little short of fiery

Khader Nawaz Khan Road's latest, The KNK Project, serves up regional Indian cuisines from the East and West



Flavour profile The restaurant has a few aces up its sleeve

▪ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



MEGHNA MAJUMDAR

What dish is synonymous with Rajasthan? *Laal maas*. What produce is Assam famous for, world over? Bhut jolokia chillies. The KNK Project's menu features both of them, each served in a way that is politely true to its origin, yet cautiously (read: disappointingly) bereft of the heat that makes it a food worth flaunting.

Nevertheless, they are still hearty and delicious, the former a signature, fiery red (colour only, taste not so much), topped with dry red chillies of menacing proportions. And the latter cooked into a thick chicken curry, with meat that is oh-so-soft to bite into. Chef Navin Prasad's vision with The KNK Project is to introduce Chennaiites to cuisines not only down South, but also to the East and



THE KNK PROJECT

Ground Floor, Rutland Tower, 33, Shafee Mohammed Road, Thousand Lights West, Nungambakkam

HITS: Beef bone marrow *salli*, *paniyaram* and egg

MISSES: *Roti*, anything sweet at all

MEAL FOR TWO: ₹800

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West, bringing in dishes that Bengal, Assam and Nagaland on one hand and Rajasthan, Goa and Gujarat on the other are particularly proud of (they also have dishes from Madhya Pradesh and Punjab). Naturally, there is much to choose from, and some of the staff is happy to explain the origins and contents of each dish.

To begin with, I opt for a *paniyaram* and egg frittata and a beef bone marrow *salli*. The former, when it arrives, strikes me as the kind of dish that is best enjoyed on a late Sunday morning. It is a mix

of fresh, hot *paniyaram* and yellow-white fried eggs, but that description does not suit it. Think, instead, of *vada* soaked in *sambhar* for a long, long time. Now take that moist, tasty softness and wrap it in a fluffy, semi-crisp fried egg, with a liberal sprinkling of fried curry leaves and pepper. The dish takes two comforting, distinctly different breakfast dishes and marries them, and surprisingly enough, it works. Be warned: it is as wide as a personal pan pizza and much thicker, so whet your appetite before you order.

Beef bone marrow *salli* is essentially minced beef served in (and around) a cleaned-out bone marrow that serves as a little boat-like container. Served alongside are chilli powder-sprinkled boiled eggs, and a combination of soft caramelised onions and crisp straw-thin fried potato shreds that hit the spot. Potatoes, after all, make the perfect companion for red meat, unless you count the hidden little chunks of juicy, fatty liver that surprise you in every other spoonful. Though a starter, it comes with a side of breads as requested (in this case, some tandoori *roti*), because "it just works better that way".

My vegetarian main course for the night is *vendakkai mulakathathu*, a lady's finger preparation that I will come to in a moment. But first, I need to talk about the *parotta* it is served with. Any place that serves a good, fluffy Kerala *parotta* is a winner by default (this is fact, not opinion), even if its other, brown *rotis* are more than a tad dry. The *parotta* is crunchy on top, cushiony below, and peels off in easy concentric rings that are oddly satisfying to watch. The lady's finger, in turn, is so slippery that it almost slides off from the *parotta* it is wrapped in (the servers are polite enough to ignore me as I fumble). It is cooked with a gravy that is heavy with the munchiness of onion and tomato, but what really hits you at first taste is coconut. It dominates the dish entirely, and I am not complaining.

What I do feel like complaining about, is that amid the vast, pleasing range of meats, vegetables and breads, there is not a single dessert to be seen. So, despite having feasted no holds barred, I am left craving just a little bit more.