

Custodian of Tradition

Upholding the values of tradition

For a man who believes that food is the best way to a person's heart, reviving old cuisine, continuing our tradition of sweets and *karas* especially during festival time, is part of a personal passion...



Photos: Seven Shots

“Food is important for life,” declares M. Murali, MD, *Sri Krishna Sweets*, passionately. Food can change one's total mindset.” The *Sri Krishna* brand is well known for its adherence to quality and taste. With the opening of *Rasam*, a fine dining vegetarian restaurant chain, Murali hopes to recreate traditional food and create awareness about its benefits.

The parent brand *Sri Krishna Sweets* (SKS), with its focus on quality and consistency creates its range of traditional sweets and *karas* in its own state-of-art, 50,000 sq. ft. hygienic kitchen in *Nemam*. They pride themselves on their continuation and popularisation of tradition in their sweets and savouries; as well as in the specials they bring out for every festival – be it the *cheedais* for Krishna

Jayanthi or the *sundal* for

Navarathri.

Talking of the need this, Murali says, “Every generation, every year, tastes change. We must accept that but that doesn't mean that traditional food is bad.” Today's youngsters are bowled over by Western cuisine, especially American fast food like burgers, pizzas and hotdogs. But, points out Murali, “Traditional food is very healthy. *Idlis* and *dosas* are healthy and also low calorie. Even though our culture has changed, traditional food is acceptable for all ages, for all times.”

He gives the example of the ubiquitous *ladoo* – an all-time favourite Indian sweet. “The *ladoo* has been around for thousands of years. Even Lord Ganesha holds a *ladoo* in his hand.” He shares an interesting nugget of information with us, “In *ladoo*, *mysore pak* and *som papdi*, the ingredients are the same – Bengal gram, sugar and ghee. Though the raw materials are the same, the texture, colour and taste are different.” As times change, dishes too get tweaked to cater to different mindsets. The *Sri Krishna mysore pa* stands testimonial to this. What was traditionally a hard sweet has been transformed into a melt-in-your-mouth delicacy.

Originally, *Rasam* dished out Kongunadu cuisine, and consumers loved the unusual flavours. Today, the restaurant's menu has expanded and *idli*, *dosa*, Tandoori items, *rotis* and a delicious variety of *dals* have been introduced. And SKS prides itself on making available a breathtaking 250 varieties of sweets and a 100 varieties in *karas*.

“For me, business is not just about selling a product,” Murali states fervently. “It is about transferring energy of my love and affection to my customers. It is just like how my mother gave me food with love and affection.” A passion for tradition and pride in upholding it with values like integrity, zeal, adherence to quality... and love... for Murali this has worked magic!



Preserving heritage

Traditional food served in a traditional ambiance – M. Murali speaks of the passion behind the revival of an old house...

If you visit *Sri Krishna Sweets* in Purasawalkam or dine at *Rasam*, which is on the first floor, you can't help but be enchanted by the charming house in which the two are ensconced. This beautiful house with its gabled roofs, coloured pane windows, high ceilings and ornamental windows takes you back in time. You revel in the openness of the space, the old-world charm and rue the fact that glistening glass-fronted buildings have taken over the cityscape and impersonal apartment blocks are what we call home today.

The house is about 120-years-old, we learn. When M. Murali first visited the house, it was a godown. He fell in love with the rambling building and decided to rent it. It took two and a half years to renovate the structure and restore it to what could have been its former beauty. It was a labour of love and the final product was well worth the effort.

Says Murali, “It was a turning point for me.” The idea of *Rasam* came up because, “I wanted to serve traditional food in a traditional building.” He loves the old house saying, “I feel it is beautiful. When I go inside, I feel very safe and very comfortable.”

Even the furniture inside has been recreated to give an antique touch. The ornate swing on the ground floor is arresting and as you climb the narrow staircase to *Rasam*, prints of scenes of old Madras add to the old world charm.

Murali rues the fact that so many old buildings are being torn down but on a more practical note, he believes it is inevitable. He says, “To destroy something is so easy but to build it up is so difficult.” If he discovers old properties, he would certainly like to preserve them. “We should maintain old buildings,” he declares. And gazing at this wonderful building one can't help but agree!

The Ganesha muse



Lord Ganesha as the icon of businessmen... that is what M Murali believes in firmly. He has an amazing collection of 3,000 Ganeshas. He says, “They are all different. I am surrounded by Ganeshas! Ganesha is very lovable and he is always there for me, He does my work for me!”

Murali believes that businessmen can pick up important cues from the elephant-headed God. He feels Ganesha is intrinsically linked to business and there are lessons one can learn. “The first thing is the elephant's walk. An elephant has such a confident walk. That is important for a businessman – to walk with confidence,” he says, “An elephant is very down to earth; even a small boy can handle an elephant. Whether a person is big or small, you must listen to other people's views. Thirdly, Ganesha is the number one God of the Hindus and he is easily present all over the city. Everywhere, there are temples to Ganesha. Similarly, businessmen must be easily available to their customers.”

Now wonder he collects Ganeshas... they have proved to be a great source of inspiration for him!



Text: Vinita Nayar; Photos: Seven Shots

