

The allure of Aroyee: Fine-dining in your own home

"Aroyee mai?" These two words ring out in the street food hubs of Thailand, the first bite inevitably complemented by the question. A simple translation is, "Is it delicious?"

The Thai people love their food and thus are curious as to the sensations each delectable dish invokes in one's palate. At Aroyee, a premier dining experience, each dish is promised to be "aroyee" or delicious and hence the name. But this is just the start of a fascinating story with numerous layers, each nestled in a compelling narrative of its own.

To understand Aroyee, it should be treated like a puzzle, each component joining to form a wonderful story whilst promising an equally wonderful experience.

When I was invited to dine with Phillip Choudhury, the Head Chef and Creative Director of Aroyee and his wife Shaila Rahman, Managing Director, Quay Asia Ltd (Bangladesh), I had a number of reservations.

Firstly, I was still perceiving Aroyee as a traditional catering service, the only difference being that they would be serving Thai food. Even the idea of Thai food did not appeal much to me because I admit, I had not developed a palate for it yet. After the very first bite, though, my worldview was about to change.

We began with a starter, a slight teaser of the explosion of flavours I was about to indulge in - Ground Chicken with Thai Spices and Hill Herb Pesto.

The presence of "Hill" herbs piqued my interest; this is when another, noble, aspect of the Aroyee story was revealed to me; the

the love they shared with the people who had welcomed them into their small communities many years ago. Their endeavour was developed to help the poor farmers and the fruits of their labour which now decorated my plate, tantalising our taste buds.

As Aroyee's narrative evolved from a simple dining experience to an actual, feasible social project, the second course was set before me. It was a salad comprising of Salmon, Hill citrus and Hill cucumbers, or wild marfa.

This was the dish that really brought forth the boldness and the freshness of the ingredients, especially the citrus and the cucumber. The citrus used almost had a tangy sweetness to it, one perfectly juxta-

and Rangamati.

Committed to the cause, Aroyee hires people straight from the hills. Potential candidates are recommended either by the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs or by the trustees of an orphanage in Rangamati, Maonoghar. These recruits are then brought to Dhaka where they are paid a monthly stipend, along with living accommodations, even while on training.

With no prior experience required, Aroyee opens up brand new doors of employment opportunities for these individuals. With strangely shared culinary habits of the residents of the Hill Tracts and Thailand, many ingredients and methods are found to be common, giving the potential recruits a head start in the kind of taste

managers. The manager learns all about your favourite foods and from then everything is customised accordingly.

If your event requires further attention, a meeting with the head chef is in the offing. The head chef and the event manager then design your menu. The next step is for the event manager to know the ins and outs of your own kitchen because that is where the food will be cooked.

Aroyee prepares the food in your own kitchen so it is literally served right out of the stove, steaming and ready to go.

The chefs bring everything they need; from utensils to the designer cutlery, to make your event stand out, adding a further shine to your occasion. Menu cards can be designed and placed on the table.

Everything is done keeping in mind the concept of fine dining. Not a single detail is spared and your home is transformed into a 5-star dining setting, with no stones unturned.

Having learned this, the final items of our course was placed before me. A hill citrus sorbet helped clean the palate right before the dessert. The dessert was a scrumptious serving of black sticky rice made in the hills served with cashews, also sourced from the hills and coconut cream.

It was sugar-rush heaven; a perfect blend of crunch and slurp, washing away all I had to eat while cooling the stomach instantly. The taste? Fresh, like I had just been served in the garden from where the bounties had been grown.

This was a bittersweet experience for me;



posed against the salmon.

The jewel in the crown, so to speak, of this particular treat though was the Wild Marfa, or small cucumbers. Grown in the deep reaches of the jungles hugging the hills, the cucumbers appeared similar to gherkins. A crunchy texture married the tangy flesh in perfect harmony and it worked exceptionally well in a salad.

I had to wonder at this point, which chef had dreamt this up, because I had never

they wish to present.

The main course was then set before me - Massaman Thai beef curry with two kinds of hill potato, one a product of jhum cultivation. The hill potato was, I believe, a jungle potato, dotted with fine strands of hair-like protrusions. These potatoes were promised to be very creamy and they were, with a bit of sweetness to them. It was cooked to perfection too; none of that rubbery after-taste.



seen nor tasted anything like it before.

"Phillip is the one who works on creating the menu and incorporating the ingredients we get," Shaila remarked, the pride beaming on her face. Phillip informed me that he had self-taught himself Thai cuisine while living in Thailand. "I find Thai food to be fantastic," Phillip said. Just like that, another piece of the Aroyee puzzle fell into place. Apart from just sourcing the most exotic ingredients from Chittagong Hill Tracts and combining them with imported meats, poultry and fish, the Aroyee team is actually made up of the residents of the Hill Tracts. The two junior chefs, Jesmin Chakma and Alo Talukder, belong to Khagrachhari



The Massaman curry lived up to its potential with a melt in your mouth goodness that was hard to miss. The second potato was slightly more "rugged", bit more chewy but no less delicious. Yet another explosion of flavours followed, my stomach finding itself in a dilemma; it wanted more while feeling full at the same time.

At this point, the focus shifted to what more Aroyee had to offer, apart from an unbeatable taste and a solid social aspect to their project. Aroyee is a fine dining experience unlike any other. The luxurious menu is designed in consultation with the client and it differs from occasion to occasion. The first step is a meeting with one of Aroyee's event



the evening had come to an end and the delicious food and the wonderful company too had come to a close.

My Aroyee experience was one of an appetising elegance; there was so much style and so much substance, none overshadowing the other. If one is planning an exclusive party to remember then let Aroyee be your go-to experience. It has a feel-good factor about it also, but the food alone is hands-down one of the best Thai cuisine experiences you will ever get.

A lot more can be said but let's leave that for another day and another spectacular meal.

Aroyee offers full event management services and is perfect for both large parties and small romantic dinners for two. There are numerous packages and plans for you to check out so give them a shout right now and enjoy the Aroyee experience of fine dining in the comforts of your own home!

Aroyee can be reached at life@aroyee.com or check out the website: aroyee.com.

By Osama Rahman

Photo courtesy: Aroyee



first piece of the puzzle, so to speak.

"Back in 2004 when I worked for UNDP's projects in the Chittagong Hill tracts, I met people from a number of groups with varying cultures. It surpassed work to become a personal journey through their lives, their struggles and their dreams. Working there, I observed what it was like to live without being integrated. It showed me how divergent the various cultures present there were," Shaila remembered.

Over time, a relationship developed, based not just on trust but also borne of love, which made Shaila and Phillip come back to the hills. And that is when the seed of an idea was planted, which would later bloom as Aroyee that we see today.

To aid and empower the people of the hills, Phillip and Shaila, on their various excursions in the region, found the many bounties it had to offer. Beyond the romanticised notion of the area lay a very fertile land, one that offered fruits, plants, spices and herbs yet to be absorbed into our mainstream food culture.

As Phillip and Shaila wrote their own wonderful love story, they also never forgot