

Celebrating Tamil New Year: A Supper Club and Local Chapter Event

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Imagine you land a dream job and have to leave Canada tomorrow. What are five food items, ingredients, kitchen gadgets or tools that you would take with you to preserve your cultural heritage? We posed this question to a room full of hungry diners at a recent event co-hosted by the CAFS GTA Local Chapter and [the Depanneur](#).



Image 1: Mother and Daughter Chef Team

A sold-out supper club, the event took guests on a journey centred on one family's story of migration. Beyond savoury fritters, laddus, pickles, pachadis, rich stews and curries, the menu was a celebration of the Tamil New Year. While often enjoyed in Tamil homes and within the community, it featured [dishes](#) not commonly found at GTA restaurants.

In a multicultural city, where more than half our residents are foreign born, I regularly find myself asking: what does our food say about who we are and where we come from? We dug into this question as CAFS member (Narayan Subramoniam) facilitated a Q&A with the chefs—his mom and sister. Chef Bhuvana (the matriarch)

shared the story of her family's origins in Tamil Nadu, growing up in Mumbai, and living in Calcutta and Bahrain, before moving to Mississauga. Driven by the promise of opportunity and a better future, each move was met with resolve to reorient, re-establish, and adapt to foreign places that became home again.

To this day, food has been central to their family's journey. From cooking for family, to hosting weekly dinners that gathered two hundred friends and neighbours, food has been both a glue and catalyst for forming communities everywhere they've lived. Chuckling at fond memories, the mother and daughter team noted that feeding others is a spiritual practice. Food has also been a source of creativity as each move brought new ingredients and flavours to their table. They shared, for example, how the use of dates in the laddus was incorporated from their time in Bahrain. The same ingredients can also taste different from place to place, requiring a chef's touch to get the



Image 2: Dinner guests enjoying food

flavour just right. As a vegan chef, Sumi shared her personal stories on vegan adaptations of familiar flavours.

When asked what they'd bring should they uproot their lives again, the chefs' responses revealed items that hold personal meaning and cultural significance. In a world where access to nearly every ingredient and tool is possible, their spice grinder and family's household spice powder—sambar podi, were named without a doubt.



Image 2: Family photo (from left to right—Andrei, Chef Bhuvana, Chef Sumi, and Subbu). Photo missing Narayan.

One guest who, seated near the kitchen had the pleasure of observing the family in action, asked “who’s really in charge?” The room roared with laughter as the family members looked at each other before all looking at Chef Bhuvana. Toward the end of the Q&A, Bhuvana’s husband, Subbu, eventually chimed in for some of the credit, noting his mother’s longstanding advice that 95% of the kitchen work is the chopping and prep work, for which he is responsible.

As the evening slowed, the chefs brought out the final course—a vegan interpretation of a common digestive aid made of spiced buttermilk. Glasses clinked as the room toasted to the Tamil New Year. Puthandu Vazhukal! With hearts and bellies full, diners stayed to chat awhile before trickling out. CAFS bookmarks were given as a keepsake of the evening shared. A few CAFS members who stayed to chit chat about going ons in their worlds were some of the last to leave that evening.