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FRIDAY FOOD

For a hefty dosa of South Indian

There's nothing like stodge to fill you up. After eating at Saravanaas, a new Indian vegetarian restaurant in Curry Hill, I rolled out in a stupor: the result, I'm sure, of eating rice, lentils, wheat and potatoes all at the same meal.

Saravanaas, the first New York branch of a South-Indian chain, is a crisp, pretty room that has scarlet hangings and gold sunflowers on one wall and golden hangings and red asters on the other. The fresh and varied cooking makes it easy to be a vegetarian — even a vegan — without feeling deprived.

You can have a masala dosa — a brittle, paper-thin pancake folded over mashed potatoes and onions (\$6.95) or an onion dosa with sauteed onions cooked in the pancake (\$6.95). You can have crispy potato fritters, deep-fried balls of spiced potato dipped in batter and served with two outstandingly fresh coconut chutneys (\$3.95), a bowl of creamy tomato soup (\$3.50) or rice cooked with lentils, vegetables and hot chilis, served with paper-thin potato crisps (\$4.95)

But order a thali and you'll get a whole meal on a cool steel platter. In the middle is a mound of rice, and around it are little cups holding two soups; lentils and tamarind curries; sautéed cabbage, eggplant and okra, and squash; yogurt, buttermilk and a surprisingly warm sweet sip of rice and tapioca pudding (\$13.95 and plenty for two).

The kitchen cooks everything to order, which can make for a slow meal, and some of the staff speak no English at all. But they're glad to find someone who can explain to you just exactly what is in the orange lump that looks like passion fruit sorbet (it's semolina) or the white mound that looks

like Cream of Wheat (rice porridge).

Don't bother with dessert. Instead, let a tall glass of sweet mango lassi cool you off this hot summer. Who knows more about heat than south Indians?

Irene Sax

☉ Saravanaas,
81 Lexington Ave. at
26th, (212) 679-0204.
All cards. Daily
except Monday,
noon to 3 p.m.
and 5-10 p.m.



eats
beat

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citywide

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from anywhere

CURRY ON: Veena Ramalah holds a serving of channa batura at Saravanaas restaurant.

JOHN TRACY