

WHATS COOKIN'

Restaurant Review by Saaquib Rangoonwala

This month's sign of the apocalypse approaching is my recent discovery of an Indian-Pakistani restaurant that provides excellent service! When I say discovery, I mean it in the way they say Columbus discovered America. Apparently, Makkah Halal Tandoori Restaurant has been around for a few years, owned and operated by the Kashruz brothers - Ahmad, Muhammad, and Zaman. Although I have made frequent trips to the Islamic center of Southern California, I have never heard of this terrific restaurant located in the strip mall across the street. The secret is out!

I have always said there is no real distinction between the Indian-Pakistani restaurants dotted across the Southern California map. Sure, I may like one more at one place than another and the Saga Pannier might be better at a different location. I don't know if it is true, but the superior service at Mach Halal Tandoori seems to make all the food taste better than the competition.

Two things about the menu stand out. First, there is tremendous variety. Secondly, the variety is there despite the fact that head chef Fabler Ragman prepares no beef dishes! Even the Seek Kabob is fine, minced lamb cooked on skewers with herbs and spices.

There are five appetizers to choose from or you can have them all by ordering the brilliantly named Assorted Appetizers! The abovementioned Seek Kabob is good, as are the Lamb Tike, Chicken Tike, and Samosas. But I like the Onion Packers the best. Frying the fritters in gently spiced batter makes for a crispy, tasty treat.

Chicken Tike Measlier is this eatery's specialty and I can honestly say it's the best I've tasted. The chicken is marinated in Yogurt, fresh herbs and spices, then cooked with tomato-based sauce. The sauce is delightfully creamy. I also tried the Chicken Dhansak, cooked in a thick lentil sauce with herbs that give it a slight sweet n sour flavor. Zaman tells me the spiciest dish is the Vindaloo, made with potatoes and a touch of fresh lemon. Bring it on, Baby!

I mentioned the wide selection on the menu. Case in point, there are eight different kinds of Naan, the bread that is baked in the Tandoori or clay oven. The garlic Naan is incredibly light and fluffy. I also tried the interesting cheese Naan, which is similar to a cheese Quesadilla.

The chicken Biryani is unlike any I have had - in a good way! It must be the raisins and cashews that are mixed in with the mildly spiced chicken and rice. It's like a cross between traditional Biryani and the Persian rice dish, Adas Polo. Yes, of course I ordered Chicken Tandoori. The aroma was wonderful as the dish of tender marinated chicken and sizzling onions came directly out of the Tandoori and onto my table. I devoured it like there is no tomorrow!

Makkah Halal Tandoori has a lunch buffet everyday from 11:30 to 2:30. for \$8.95, you can eat as many as ten different menu items, with Chicken Tandoori and Chicken Makhani the staples of the buffet. The other items change on a daily basis, but there will always be three meat dishes, a rice dish, one type of Naan, salad, and dessert. If you are not at the adjacent mosque and want to avoid Koreatown traffic, they deliver within a three mile radius.

Great food and great service at an Indian-Pakistani restaurant? What's next - the Clippers finishing a basketball season with a better record than the Lakers?! Bush getting re-elected!?!?