

Taste Of Punjab

By Victor Strugo on June 21, 2011 in Victor Strugo Restaurant reviews

ONE JAB AT THE PUNJAB

Words maketh a writer, but they can also be his undoing. Categorising a restaurant by its nationality, for instance, can be a gross over-simplification because culinary idioms vary among regions and provinces - particularly in vast lands like China and India.

With so many Indian restaurants in this city one might expect wide regional spectrum, yet for commercially pragmatic reasons, most tend to cluster around easily recognisable “national” dishes. For anything more adventurous, one has to trawl endlessly long menus.

Happily, a few braver operators are differentiating themselves. Southern India is now represented by excellent Dravidian and Keralian cuisines in Greenside and Norwood. Far more common are generic north-focused eateries, but I was pleased when a cricketing broadcaster (he Batzofin but seldom bowls) signalled to me that Parkview now offers - literally - A Taste of Punjab.

In India’s north-western corner, spice tends more toward aromatics than explosives. Dishes are typically rich (lots of ghee and other milk products, stuffed fried paratha breads), having evolved to nourish hard-working rural folk.

Many Punjabi dishes are within local diners’ comfort zone, so manager Ram Avtar is not surprised that his most popular dishes are deboned butter chicken (cooked in the tandoor and simmered in tomato sauce) and mild (cashew-based) kormas.

Taste of Punjab’s menu declares that they tone down the richness to suit modern preferences but retain integral flavours - a claim we tested by sharing lots of dishes and seeing if we’d then walk or waddle away.

The immaculate restaurant is intimately sized and has politely attentive staff. Like its predecessors in this space (remember the original Broughton's?), there is charm in its tranquil location deep within the Village Centre, thought being invisible to the street is a business drawback.

That perhaps accounts for the flat-screen TV they use to woo the philistine masses who have to watch rugby while shovelling food into their gobs. Have we forever lost the ability to converse over meals? Are sport-obsessed fathers too immature to set their HDD recorders and listen to their families?

The first thing I did here was insist they mute the test match. Try this: no-one ever objects and the silent majority will be grateful. Low Indian music was far more congenial.



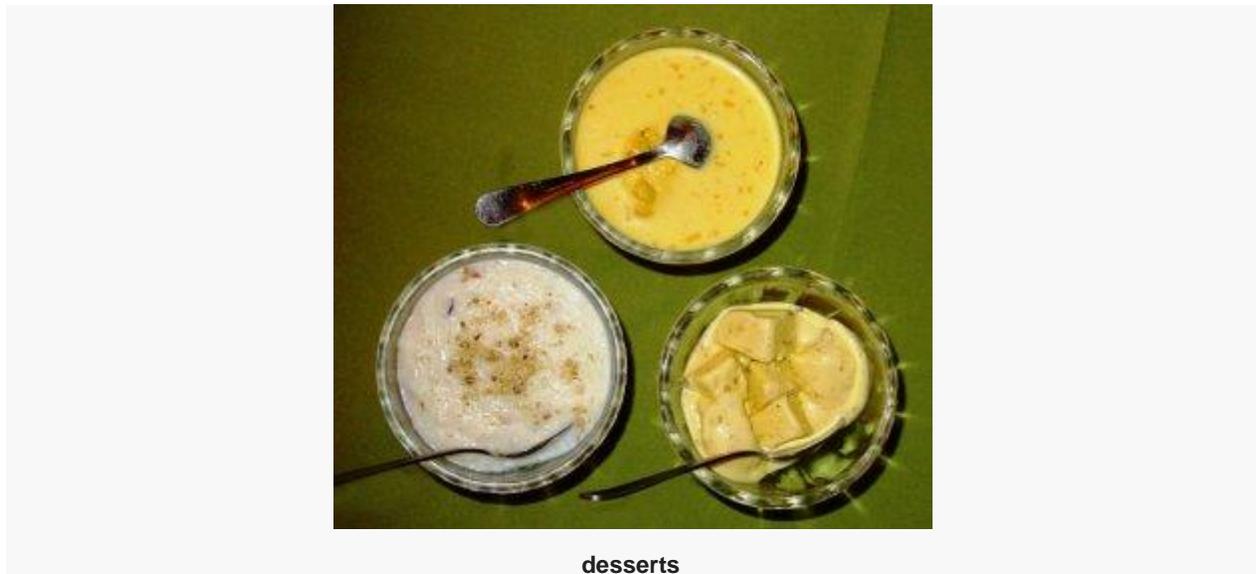
After nibbling on excellent sambals and crisp cumin-encrusted papadums, we ordered a kaleidoscope of tastes (and colours) to share. Dishes came in steel katoris that looked small but satisfied fully.

Having a vegetarian guest, Madam and I made do with a single meat dish. Yes, yes, I know that lamb vindaloo is Goanese and not Punjabi but it's a menu must. This particular one was rich and yummy, ordered hot (as an excuse to quaff more wine) but we both rated the chilli factor as medium.

The wine list, incidentally, is compact, well-priced and well-tailored to Indian cuisine. By that I mean it includes fragrantly fruity white cultivars

such as viognier and chenin which work far better with curries than do sauvignon or chardonnay.

Three vegetable dishes encircled our big communal bowl of basmati rice. Madam is a dhal addict, but was willing to forego her favourite black lentils (dhal makhni) for their yellow cousins, which seem bit less filling.



Our guest chose the aloo mattar gobhi, which translates as potato, peas and cauliflower simmered in a yellow curry sauce. We all liked this, but not as much as the divine palak paneer.

Paneer is Indian cottage cheese, cubed into bright green creamed palak, or spinach. Made adroitly, there are few more addictive concoctions - whether you pour the velvety nectar onto basmati or scoop it up with a handful of hot peshwari (made with nuts and dried fruit) naan bread. It has the same aromatics (garlic and cumin) as the dhal, but there's no similarity because self-respecting cooks use a different masala base for different dishes.

For afters, the ras malai, kheer and especially creamy kulfi were all good, though I found the masala tea shy on spice.

A good place, then, to take a jab at the Punjab.

Taste Of Punjab

13th November 2010

Where?

- 60 Tyrone Avenue
- Parkview
- Tel: 011 646-9031

When?

Lunch & dinner daily

How Many?

- 35 inside
- 45 in concourse

How Much?

- Starters R20 - R57
- Vegetarian Mains R55 - R63
- Mains R50 - R85
- Breads R10 - R19
- Desserts R15 - R18
- Lunch Specials R37 - R50

GASTROGNOMETER

- Food * * * ½
- Wine * * ½
- Service * * * *
- Ambience * * *
- Value * * * * *