



Upscale' *Indian dining* in Coral Springs

By Charles Marcanetti

Some reviews are harder to write than others. Some restaurants are harder to review than others. Here we have a confluence of the two, as it is difficult to write about fabulous but exotic (to the stereotypical American palate) foods presented in a positively serious but very casual restaurant. Some explaining is in order. Taste Buds of India, located at 7881 West Sample Road in Coral Springs (954-603-6996), is a genuine upscale Indian restaurant. However, 'upscale' by Indian standards is vastly different from American 'upscale.' Commonly here, we call 'upscale' posh, expensive, sedate décor, snooty service and a quiet atmosphere. In India and at Taste Buds of India, upscale means regional Indian dishes prepared exquisitely, meticulously, and consistent with age-old traditions (even the modern variations on a theme), served by joyful servers, in a brightly lit dining area with plenty of room between tables – just like it is done in India. Maybe because India, along its entire sub-continental borders, is so crowded that 'space' is considered a sign of 'posh.'

Maybe in a country where the very poor (happily, rapidly diminishing) exist side-by-side with the more affluent does traditional mean common, as well as current. I don't know. I do know, however,



that Taste Buds of India presents its customers an array of transcontinental dishes that are perfectly spiced-to-order for anyone's tolerance. And that, my friends, is a great accomplishment all by itself. Our host, the chef and one of the owners, Arvind Kumar, looks far too young to have the knowledge, experience and subtlety that can come with age, but too often doesn't. Arvind has all of those qualities and more. He is charming and personable, but would much rather let his recipes speak for him. And, they do. They shout excellence.

Because there is virtually no pre-cooking, no pots full of this and steam-tables full of that, you ought not to think you'll be in and out in no time. Your lunch or dinner will be made fresh when you order it and 'fresh' takes time. Don't get me wrong, I don't mean 'forever.' I mean that Chef Arvind is crafting your meal, not throwing it on the stove. He is cutting and slicing (by hand) whatever ingredients go into whatever you ordered. He is checking the order sheet to make sure that the spiciness is just as you requested. And, perhaps more importantly, he is letting you savor each and every course. So, relax a while. Breathe in the aromas, enjoy the music, and let your meal introduce you to Indian hospitality.

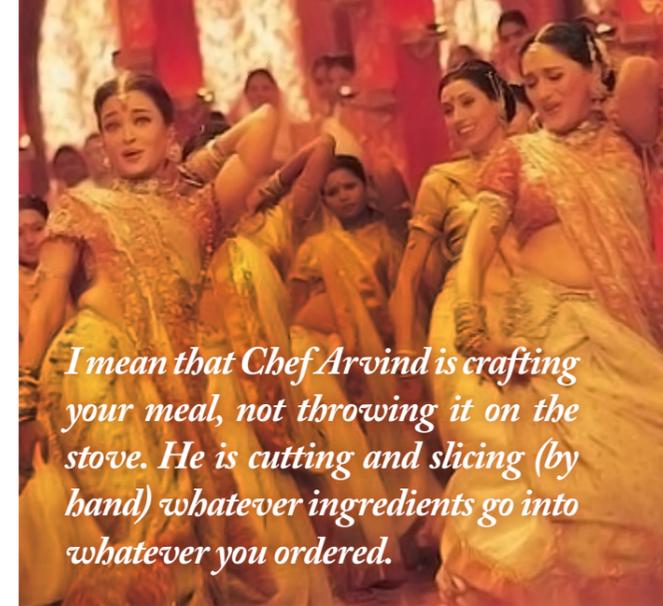
Our evening started with appetizers of vegetable samosa, which are crisp patties stuffed with potatoes and peas with a little Indian spice. We also had the lamb samosa. I loved the Lasooni Gobi, which is crispy cauliflower florets tossed in a tomato and garlic sauce. I really enjoyed the garlic prawn, made with fresh prawns, marinated with herbs and sautéed in garlic, then cooked with tomatoes and coconut. Because I was amused by the name, I ordered a soup called Mulligatawny Shorba, which is chicken lentil soup with tomatoes and herbs. Now, I'm impressed with the actual soup. You will be, also.

I have always liked 'poori.' At Taste Buds of India, it is a real specialty. We tried Dahi Sev Pooi, which are puffed hollow wheat biscuits, filled with potato, yoghurt (notice the British spelling) and tangy chutneys (served alongside). You are advised, by the restaurant, to pop them whole in the mouth for a flavor explosion. I agree. Having had the following two chicken entrees before (in India), I ordered them at Taste Buds, and I can say they are fabulous and they brought my senses back to one of my favorite countries on this planet.



Chicken Tikka Masala, consisting of boneless chicken pieces cooked with cream, fresh tomato sauce, onion, green pepper and Indian spices, and the butter chicken, consisting of boneless leg quarter chicken with a tomato-based rich, creamy sauce and Indian spices. I delighted in the tenderness of the Tikka Masala - lamb with cream, fresh tomato sauce, onion, green pepper and spices, and the Lamb Rogan Josh - lamb pieces with cardamom, ginger, garlic, yogurt, onion, tomato, and spiced flavor curry sauce.

Did I mention that Taste Buds of India has a giant menu both in size and items? Well, they do, and so I could not try everything, even on our review night (my third visit). Their shrimp were fresh,



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crispy and sweet. The saffron mussel stew was loaded with mussels and flavor... steamy hot and quite aromatic, consisting of black mussels cooked with a spiced flavor creamy sauce, tomato and nuts.

I went into the kitchen to make sure they really had a tandoori oven/stove and not some 'make-do' imitation. It was the real thing, and the tandoori dishes were certainly proof. The tandoori chicken, which is chicken, marinated in yogurt, ginger, and garlic and freshly ground spices - then cooked in a clay oven (a unique evenly heated oven that allows for cooking inside and across the surface with skewers) was great, as was the tandoori shrimp, where the shrimp are marinated in yogurt, garlic and spices and then cooked in the tandoori oven.

In case you are not aware of the best Indian rice in the world (my opinion, but shared by many), it is Basmati rice. It was near perfect at Taste Buds. But, Chef Arvind makes a great Kashmiri pilaf as well. He uses Basmati rice and sautés in almonds, cashews, green peas and raisins. One type of Indian bread is called Naan. I recommend you try a large assortment, but caution you to time yourself, as you will want to keep eating and they are filling - delicious, but filling.

I close with a little advice: Indian food tends to be spicy, but the spiciness is body-warming and isn't anything like the quick heat of Japanese Wasabi or the mouth numbing fire of Mexican chilis. Indian spice is subtle and designed to bring out the flavors of the food, not cover them up. At Taste Buds of India they do a masterful job of spicing the food exactly as each customer desires. But, it is always wise to have a yogurt dish or beverage (Lassi) on hand to cool the mouth if you want.

Taste Buds of India is quite a wonderful addition to our list of local eateries worth spending time in. It is also a wonderful way of experiencing the food of one of the fastest growing and oldest cultures on earth. 🍛