



# THE PALACE

By Charles Marcanetti

Over the past several years, I have reviewed just three Indian restaurants. During my travels, I have accumulated about a year and a half of living and traveling in India. I love India. The people are warm and gracious and, despite poverty unknown in the USA, the people are life-embracing and optimistic. Recently, I had the privilege of meeting Avtar Singh Saini, the owner of The Palace Restaurant located at 11422 S.R. 84 in Davie (exit Hiatus Road South from I-595, 954-370-4750). He advertises his restaurant as "Fine Indian Cuisine" and I couldn't agree more.

Upon entering, one is immediately aware this is no over-the-top establishment. Rather, it is a mellow, even muted, relaxing dining space. There is soft music, soft lighting and an unhurried atmosphere that makes customers feel right at home.

Mr. Saini greeted us with a pleasant, but not affected disposition, clearly reflective of his deep faith. Mr. Saini is a Sikh. Sikhism was founded on the teachings of Guru Nanak and ten successive Sikh Gurus (enlightened teachers) in fifteenth century Punjab. It is the fifth-largest organized religion in the world.

The principal belief of Sikhism is faith in waheguru, the Universal God. Sikhism advocates the pursuit of salvation through disciplined, personal meditation on the name and message of God. Most Sikhs live in the Punjab area of India. Sikhism's traditions and teachings are distinctively associated with the history, society and culture of the Punjab.

We are fortunate this Sikh chose to live among us. He brought his recipe book and his prayer book. He built his restaurant around each. The food is imbued with a balance of sweet and spice, of light and dark, and of warm and cool.

Traditionally, Indian dishes are not served as large portions, rather the meals seek to offer several smaller dishes of differing tastes. So, a meal of a rice dish, a fish dish and a meat dish is not uncommon (heavier meats, because of the expense in India, are usually reserved for more special occasions). Here, we dined on an array of dishes because Mr. Saini wanted us to experience a real Indian feast.

First and foremost, let me recommend the Deluxe Bread Basket, consisting of several types of Indian bread. It was fantastic. Each type had a unique flavor and texture. Some were soft and chewy, some were crisp and crunchy. We loved it all.

Our main appetizer was the Mixed Appetizer Platter consisting of Samosa, Pakora, Chicken, Tikka and Seekh Kebab. Now, I know you are asking, "What the %#\* are those things?" Very simple: the chicken is a domesticated fowl (LOL) and the Kebab is skewered food. As for the rest...the Samosa are items (like vegetables) served in a crispy pastry shell, the Pakora are crispy fritters of potato, onions and spinach, the Tikka are delicious shallow fried potato patties and the Seekh Kabab is minced lamb with aromatic herbs and spices skewered and grilled in a clay oven. All was tasty, light and soft on the palate. You won't be disappointed.

Let me also state the Onion Bahjia (crispy, deep fried spiced onion fritters) and the Palace Scallops, served in a sweet and sour sauce flavored with mustard seeds and curry leaves and a baby naan (a flat leavened bread, baked in a tandoor (a barrel shaped clay oven fired by charcoal) are delicious.

We chose to try numerous half orders. Let me assure you, they are ample and a wonderful way of getting to taste many of these delicacies without getting too stuffed. We had the Tandoori Chicken, which is the show piece of Indian culinary art. It is chicken, marinated in yogurt and spices overnight, then cooked in a clay oven. We also had the Tandoori Shrimp, which is a dish to savor because the shrimp are giant and, when marinated in yogurt, smoked garlic and caraway seeds and then grilled in tandoor, you'd think you were somewhere in the inner jungles of India on a cool, breeze-filled night listening to the sounds of the wilderness as you indulge.

The grilled Ginger Lamb Chops were tender and, in addition to the ginger, were prepared with papaya and other spices. Like the others, we again experienced this dish cooked in tandoor.

I want to spend a few minutes now discussing three vegetarian specialties, because dishes from historically poor countries do not usually revolve around meat. Meat is scarce, so over the centuries the resilient people created many different ways of preparing the few vegetables available. Today, though more foods are available, we are treated to perfected recipes that have stood the test of time.

Saag Paneer is homemade cheese cooked in a creamy spinach sauce. Dum Aloo are whole baby potatoes cooked in a sealed pot infused with a light yogurt gravy. Yellow Daal are yellow lentils cooked in a traditionally Indian style and tempered with onions, tomatoes and spices. They are delicious and filling and, the part I really want to mention, the blend of the spices and yogurt balances the spice-heat with a cooling back flavor. What this combination tends to do is allow the body to stay cooler in the sweltering Indian days and warmer in the cooler Indian evenings. It works well right here in South Florida.

This is a restaurant you and your whole family can enjoy. Adding to the experience of "learning" the many tasty treats of India is an "all you can eat" buffet lunch. The Palace also can accommodate up to 200 people for catering. With the many varieties of foods and the open seven days a week policy, we are all offered a wonderful and unique dining experience.

Food editor, Charles Marcanetti, has been around the food industry most of his life, beginning with working at his father's restaurant. He enjoys writing about food as much as he does eating it.

