



## RESTAURANT REVIEW

Memsaab, Nottingham

It has become a tradition of mine to review an Indian restaurant at the beginning of the year. Partly this is because most people are skint after the financial rigours of Christmas and curries tend to be relatively cheap, but also it is because, after several weeks of eating festive (for which read English) food, I am desperate for a change. There is also the fact that, and I'm not sure if I've ever mentioned this before, I love curry. One day I might even have a tee shirt printed up proclaiming the fact.

For several years now there has been a quiet revolution going on in the world of the Indian restaurant. Of course, the traditional curry house is very much alive and well and that is all to the good; the revolution is in the form of what I would term the rise of the classy curry. So what distinguishes a classy curry from a traditional one?

For starters (no pun intended), the restaurant itself is decidedly more stylish. Gone are the MDF fretwork, garish wallpaper and strange pictures of ladies with lots of arms. Instead there is sleek wood and stone flooring, neutral colour schemes, expensive lighting and tasteful artwork and fixtures to give a hint of the east. The food is different too, more varied than the faithful stand-bys of korma, Rogan Josh, Madras et al with higher quality ingredients and a broader range of them too. The service may be a tad more professional and a little less frantic, though I know several local curry



houses where the service is excellent. Last but not least, there is the matter of price; you can expect to pay a similar amount for your classy curry as you would for a meal in a good quality continental restaurant.

All this leads me nicely to Memsaab in Nottingham which is truly a classy curry house in every way. It is located on Maid Marion way which seems to have reinvented itself as a leisure quarter in recent years with an array of upmarket restaurants and a casino. The restaurant is, when all is said and done, a converted retail unit and so it is all the more impressive what a good job they have made of it. The wall of plate glass windows at the front is dressed with stylish blinds to give it a glamorous feel and the raised plinth alongside it gives diners a sense that they can see and be seen. The main area of the restaurant is vast but it feels spacious rather than cavernous thanks to the clever use of contrasting marble and oak flooring to break up the space. A hint of India comes from a huge, intricately carved, reclaimed wooden divider. The furniture is much as you would find in an upmarket Brasserie, understated quality and crisp white linen table cloths topped with an array of gleaming glasses and cutlery.

So far so classy, but what about the menu? Well, if I'm eating classy curry I would expect to find a few dishes that are out of the ordinary on there and I wasn't disappointed; how about Tandoori Ostrich for instance, or



curried scallops. We had our old friends and guest reviewers Catherine and Jim along with us, welcome back, so we could check out a good range of dishes – or that was the plan, anyway. Unfortunately, Catherine demonstrated her exquisite good taste by ordering exactly the same things as I did. Consequently, we shared a platter of starters consisting of *Boti Padina* (Diced lamb fillet marinated in mint, yogurt and crushed black pepper) *Lahori Lamb Chops* (Marinated in garlic and ginger) and *Reshmi Kebab* (Minced chicken fillet with mint and coriander). All three were absolutely delicious, particularly notable for the quality of the ingredients and subtlety of the spices. Meanwhile, Jim was so impressed by our good taste that he ordered a *Boti Padina* too. Only Penny stood out from the crowd with her selection of *Spiced soft shell crab*. The clue's in the name with this one, you eat the whole thing; very distinctive and very tasty.

For my main course I picked out *Goan fish curry* which is a dish I've had before and like very much and I think the world would be a better place if it was served in more Indian restaurants. Catherine liked the look of it and decided she would give it a go too. *Goan fish curry* is relatively mild and very creamy with lots of coconut and coriander. This one had big chunks of two different types of white fish, some enormous king prawns with a beautiful firm texture and a lovely flavour to it – ten out of ten. Penny went for a tried and tested favourite, *King Prawn Jalfraze*. This also featured those sensational king prawns, plenty of spice and a good rich texture to the sauce. Jim went for a *Chicken Karahi* which is similar to a balti but not so rich in flavour and with more onions and peppers. Once again, the dish was really made by the quality of the ingredients, big succulent chunks of chicken and plenty of fresh coriander.

Unusually for a curry, we also had desserts and shared a *Pistachio Kulfi* and a *Mango and passion fruit sorbet* between us. Both were of the same high standard as the rest of the food. Memsaab has a pretty impressive wine list too but we reverted to type and washed down our food with pints of draught Kingfisher.

The service is quite formal. I don't have a problem with this as long as it is also efficient and professional and, I'm pleased to say, at Memsaab it is. The only thing left to talk about is the cost. We had three courses, some of the most expensive dishes on the menu and plenty to drink including gin and tonics when we sat down and the cost came in comfortably inside £40 per head. I have no doubt that you could have a very good meal for around the £30 mark, not what I would describe as eye-wateringly expensive. If you're in the market for a classy curry you could do a lot worse than give Memsaab a try.



Howard Clemmow

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*With thanks to the staff for some seriously good food in classy surroundings.*