



BARBARA'S BETS

Minar Palace - Evocative of India

by Barbara Ann Rosenberg

The petite (75 seat two-floor serve-yourself) restaurant is reminiscent of many such "hole in the wall" eateries in India - the mother country for the food that's served at Minar Palace, 1605 Sansom Street, just a stone's throw from the "action" at Liberty Place and on Walnut Street...not *too* far from anyplace in Center City.

The food at this authentically Punjab (i.e. North India) restaurant is good and it's plentiful. There's really only one trick to eating there...order from the menu, rather than from the steam table. It doesn't take much longer to get your food, since, somehow, it magically appears from a hidden back room within a couple of minutes of the time you order it, and I happen to think it tastes fresher.

One of my favorite dishes is lamb saag (or, for the uninitiated, lamb with

seasoned spinach). The lamb is butter tender from long, slow cooking and the spinach is almost a puree. It's served with a simple carrot-flecked Basmati rice that comes with most dishes and a tiny paper cup of lightly seasoned yogurt - and it costs \$5.25 for a decidedly ample portion.

Given my "druthers", I'll pair the lamb sag with an order of three pappadums (baked, rather than fried), those crispy, tasty scented wafers that fall under the category of "bread" in India - and my all-time favorite (either at my home, an Indian restaurant or in India, itself, where you can have either them fried...in which case they puff up to about three times their size in the raw state, or grilled...when they don't "grow" but, rather, pretty much retain their shape, and have a nice nutty crispness.

For folks who don't mind bones, the saag (spinach) also comes with goat...which is the way it's served in the mother coun-

try. Or, if addicted to spinach (as I am) it's possible to order the saag with shrimp, chicken, potatoes or chick peas.

Chicken, lamb, shrimp and vegetables come in all manner of other dishes, too - with sour cream and yoghurt (korma) and highly spiced, with a touch of vinegar (vindaloo), and there are many other preparations, too, some with really exotic names.

Vegetarians can have a field day with cauliflower, eggplant, potatoes, peas, chick peas, and homemade cheese (paneer) served alone or in combinations with various sauces...all tasty. Some pretty mild, some pretty piquant...none, however, blistering hot (unless people request more chili seasoning). Actually the way things are moving among "foodies", people's tastes are getting hotter and hotter, and chilis are among the "hottest" items being sold in supermarkets and specialty stores everywhere.

Minar Palace also features daily special platters that include combinations of regular menu items - and some that are featured only on the specified day. Friday has one of my favorites - aludum, a specifically seasoned potato curry presentation - for \$4.50.

I usually don't have room for one of the Indian desserts like ulfi (an Indian ice cream, often seasoned with rosewater or saffron), or kheer, a variation on the "usual" rice pudding with raisins, almonds, rosewater and cardamon, but if I think about it next time I'll go lightly on the main course to make sure I do. Or I'll ask for it "to go."

For people who want an Indian food "fix" without bestirring themselves from their office or home TV (or whatever), Minar Palace delivers in the Center City area, roughly from 8th Street to 24th. And it doesn't break the bank.