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The perfect palate cleanser

Meditation aside, for a true foodie, the path to purifying one's soul comes from sattvic food and you get that right in Bangalore...

Priyadarshini Nandy



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Keep all the meats in the world on one side and pure and organic food, cooked fresh every time you ask for it, is on the other. There is something very innocent about sattvic food, and that I discovered on a longish trip to Higher Taste, the fine dining restaurant at ISKCON.

To start with, you need a slight understanding of sattvic cooking because to a layman it appears as pure vegetarian food and nothing else. But that's not just it. Its roots lie literally in the Bhagvad Gita, where Krishna details out the importance of following the sattvic rule in one's diet. It was meant to bring clarity and take your mind to a different level. The cuisine doesn't use any meat, egg, onion or garlic and even fiery peppers. The food is always cooked fresh because stale food was considered to be 'dense' (tamasic) that was bad for one's soul and system. Meats were considered to be rajasic, which means anything that induces excitement of passion.

But sattvic food isn't close to the jain diet either, which is far stricter.

If you're wondering how, with so many restrictions, one can actually create a culinary delight, be assured; sattvic food can be as memorable as any other cuisine that we label exotic.

At Higher Taste, you will be taken through a world of multiple flavours. Freshly ground spices (to a minimum level), intrinsic flavours and combinations that will surprise you. I definitely was.

Their menu is quite simple. You begin with a few starters such as the Inji Vadai, where vadas are made of ginger flakes, dal and a few spices. Yes, we are quite used to them at home, especially during the rains. And take my word for it, it's exactly as scrumptious as home-made vadais. Incidentally, a lot of the dishes do remind one of things we eat at home and I reckon that's what the chefs at Higher Taste intend to give us.

Move on to the Kakori Seekh Kebab. Here, vegetables and greens are mashed together to form a smooth blend and then barbecued on skewers! The spices are again mild and the flavours are balanced precisely.

A soup (or the shorba) is a must. I tried the Malli Rasam, which is the very familiar peppery soup with coriander seeds and ginger. If you're suffering from a cold, this is your cure! The Nellikai Charu, a house special, where fresh gooseberries are cooked with dal and served piping hot is brilliant. It has a tangy undertone and leaves your upper palate tingling. However, avoid the Makai Ka Shorba if you can. It's a simple soup with corn, which also has a tangy flavour, but I am not sure if the combination really works.

From the main course section, you can choose from a wide variety of North and South Indian offerings. Try a bit of both. Years of research has gone into this menu and some dishes owe its origins to the kitchens of Chola dynasty.

For main course, I began with some Mohana Kalavai, a sambar made with toor dal and tender coconut and gently garnished with cream and tandoori roti. It's not much when you look at it, but you'll be asking for more. The dal isn't spicy and neither is it sweet — be it the salt or the spices, the chefs have perfected the art of equilibrium with this dal.

Try the Raja Bojanam next. It's ne of the restaurant's signature dishes. While they call it a rich curry, I'll call it mellow.

Dry fruits such as cashews, almonds and pistachios, some pepper and ghee go into this curry. A royal dish by right, this curry is slightly thick so it's best eaten with rotis again. Feeling a little ambitious I tried the Zafrani Kofta, with some pulav. Now this is a dish I'd call rich. Paneer, stuffed with nuts and then cooked in a cashew-based gravy that's laced with saffron, you'll be amazed how you can taste every single ingredient that has gone into the dish.

There's ample use of milk products, honey and indigenous spices in sattvic cooking. But the sure winner is the fact that nothing is over done. Moderation is the root to a higher mind and the proof of that pudding lies in their desserts. Take for instance the Elaneer Payasam, a simple chilled payasam made with coconut milk and tender coconut that soothes your senses instantly, especially if you've had a long day.

There's much more to the menu than you read here. From biryanis, sheermal, various kinds of rotis, idiyappams, curries and desserts (they even have apple strudels) — I was quite awestruck at the sheer play of variety at Higher Taste. Worth going back to? Absolutely!

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