

International Palette: A Multi-Sensory Experience as A Food Critic.

Shana Cromwell-Ramnarain

BUF 4700 Global Sourcing and International Retail Trade

Dr. Adomaitis

February 26th, 2023

International Palette: A Multi-Sensory Experience as A Food Critic.

Tikka Indian Grill is an Indian restaurant located in 34-14 30th Ave, Astoria Queens NY, 11103. Serving customers since 2015, *Tikka Indian Grill* aspires to “create authentic Indian dishes, complemented with professional service” (*Tikka Grill*, 2023). One can find their Astoria location on a busy street filled with other restaurants. The outside setting of the restaurant is very dark, with black being the main color, and a bright, vermilion red color as the accent. This bright red represents the color of an Indian tikka, which is a red dot of Vermillion made into a paste that is dotted onto the forehead between the eyebrows of married woman in India. This displays the *cultural geography*, or the way how people live their lives in different regions of the world or country (Sternquist, 2018). The vermilion plant is plentiful in Indian fields, which the people use to mark married women in the form of a tikka. One can already see the cultural representation that the grill embodies simply through their outside setting, choice of colors and theme.

Entrance

Upon entering, one is greeted by an Indian waiter dressed in black. The wait staff wore black trousers, *pleated* at the front leg, and neatly *buttoned. Tucked*, was a black dress shirt. What seemed to be a soft, cotton material made up the matte-like look of the garment. The dress shirt was *buttoned and* adorned with a bright red tie which *suspended* down the waiter’s neckline. The waitstaff was well-groomed, all males with short dark hair, *combed* neatly. One can expect a waiter to inquire about the number of seats needed, no reservation needed. The restaurant was fairly empty, so one is directed to their table at once without a vaccination or mask check.

Cultural Differences

Some cultural differences one can notice immediately is the music. The restaurant had a large screen on display on the wall, showing music videos of traditional and modern Bollywood songs. One can hear a multitude of Bollywood's most popular current songs, as well as some oldies which were mixed into the track. One could hear the sounds of traditional Indian drums, instruments, flutes and whistles which make up a majority of the music's rhythm. Accompanied by the booming music were dance choreography videos which went along with the music. One can be encaptured by the subtle movements of the female bodies, and the glorious decoration used to adorn the bodies of the dancers in the videos. Each costume, *embellished*, bright, and *embroidered* with endless sequins and we danced along with the choreography. *Culture*, can be seen through symbols, shared understandings and coordinated activities (Sternquist 2018). This can be seen through the Indian's use of Bollywood songs.

Along with the heavy Indian culture, one could smell a deep, rich toasted smell of masala, a key spice used in Indian cuisine, lingering in the air. The smell is lovely, and can entice one's hunger even more. The lights were dimmed very low, making for a close, subtle-feeling in your dining experience. The walls especially were adorned with images of Indian culture from the motherland. One will see photos of Indian streets, filed with merchants, people, men and women clothed in their everyday sari, are pictured. You can see the different colors of Indian skin, from dark, south Asian women, to the more lighter-skin women of norther India (figure 6). The busy city-street wall décor makes for a breathtaking "wow" moment when first entering the restaurant. The restaurant's dedication to heritage was felt throughout the entire location. American restaurants lacked the atmosphere, music & dance entertainment, beautiful, real-life imagery that this restaurant aimed to deliver from the Indian perspective.

The menu was traditionally Indian cuisine, separated into categories of small plates, rice dishes, meat selections, vegetarian, breads and sides, desserts and drinks. The small plates were sample platters of the bigger offerings. Dishes like Tawa Lamb Kebab featured lamb kebabs cooked in a traditional Indian Tawa, or a special flat type of pan. Chicken Malai Tikka was another meat sample dish, skewered and cooked on a traditional tandoori. One can enjoy a beautiful dinner consisting of Chicken Tikka Masala (orange chicken curry dish) with garlic naan (bread). One can also order the Goat Biryani, which is a rice dish spiced to perfection, and served with rich, flavorful goat meat, and pair this with a luscious thick Mango Lassi drink. Most of these dishes are made with Indian spices, turmeric, masala and geera. Coconut shrimp was the appetizer of choice, the creamy white sauce and coconut dish, as well as the drinks, are made with yoghurt as well; to balance out the spice. The food menu is on an interactive iPad, which one can select the different categories and read in English-only, the various menu options (figure 2, 3).

One will feel the slow burn of the spicy pepper loaded into their tasteful biryani rice. The spicy burning sensation will cause one to feel hot, but the flavorful spices, and flavor of the meat will linger along with it, leaving one satisfied, remembering the rich taste. The rich, smooth and cool feeling one gets from the Mango Lassi after this spicy dish is a perfect pair. Every biryani rice dish was spicy, there was no option to get a non-spiced version which is definitely unusual compared to American restaurants.

Desserts & Appetizers.

When one is seated, you are served a Paratha which is a fried round bread stick, served with 3 chutneys for you to choose from. This is the Indian version of salsa and chips you'd get at a traditional Hispanic restaurant. This is the only appetizer served when one first enters, for the

dessert options the menu displays traditional Indian dishes as well, no American selections or even cakes. Ras Malai, a sweet milk dish made with a special type of wheat is offered. Rice pudding, and Gulab Jamun are offered. Gulab Jamun are a favorite in Indian homes, made with fried milk balls, they are covered in a sugary brown syrup. The beverages are definitely American inspired and catered to this country's culture. While most of the menu dishes were *uni-cultural*, or "comprised of predominately one culture" (Sternquist 2018) and illuminated Indian culture, flavor, spices and smells, the drink menu was *multi-cultural*, or "comprised of several or many cultures" (Sternquist 2018). The drink menu offered Indian Mango Lassi, but also offered Pellegrino sparkling water, and soda varieties typical of American restaurants, it also had no liquor options unlike most American menus.

Geographic & Economic Influences.

India is a country rich in farmland, and spice production. The Indian country offers a multitude of spices, their most popular used for cooking and *exports* which mean goods that are traded *out* of a country that the country specializes in (Sternquist 2018). The most popular used for exports are turmeric (10%), cumin (10%), coriander (9.5%), fenugreek (4.2%) and peppers (4%) (Gidwani 2022). India is approximately in the southern part of the Asian continent, and bordered by Nepal and Pakistan (University of Illinois 2022) (figure 1). Mumbai, New Dheli, Kolkata are some of the most popular cities in India, giving one a wide range of places to try India's best and most well-known dishes such as Tikka Grill's Chicken Tikka Masala.



Figure 1

Food Critic Experience.

As a food critic, one can rate this restaurant a 8 out of 10 being generous. The location was clean, and the waiters were very mannered and quick. The bathroom was clean and pleasant in appearance with napkins “served” in a platter inside. The décor was beautiful, and very representative of typical Indian culture. It depicted everyday life for Indians very well. The authenticity of the entire experience alone, one would rate 10/10. The food delivered the traditional Indian taste in all aspects, and even introduced myself to new foods and ingredients one have not tried in the past such as the 3 chutneys. The price was a bit unequal, as the drinks and bread options were very cheap (\$4) but the main dishes ranged from \$20+. Overall, I would still give the Tikka Grill an 8/10, or a B+ for a grade. Their authenticity was perfect, the location, clean and enticing. The food was good, but not mind-blowing. The food could’ve been better in taste. The rice dishes in particular could’ve been flavored a bit differently, but that is a matter of personal opinion.

Through this experience, I learned that Indian culture can be relayed with simple aspects. Music video and dance are one of the best ways to show one the nature of Indian culture. In addition to the wonderfully flavored food, presentation of the table, and calm environment, the

music and choreography that played throughout the meal could make one dance in their seat. The lively sentiments of the Bollywood stars could be felt in the room. Some cultures specialize in other trades such as textile manufacturing, but the Indian Bollywood industry speaks volumes for India. Even when dining in a restaurant, you can tell the distinct feeling of the lively dress, flowing music and matching dance rhythms which can truly put one in a “trance”, leaving one totally encaptured in a beautiful display of Indian joy and life. In a multi-cultural experience, one can mention that certain aspects of a culture can speak more than others and sometimes complement the cultural experience more than others. Although the Indian food and spices were the main event, the music videos of Bollywood gold delivered an all-around Bollywood experience. The music, service and wonderful food and atmosphere of Tikka Indian Grill is definitely an Indian experience anyone can enjoy.

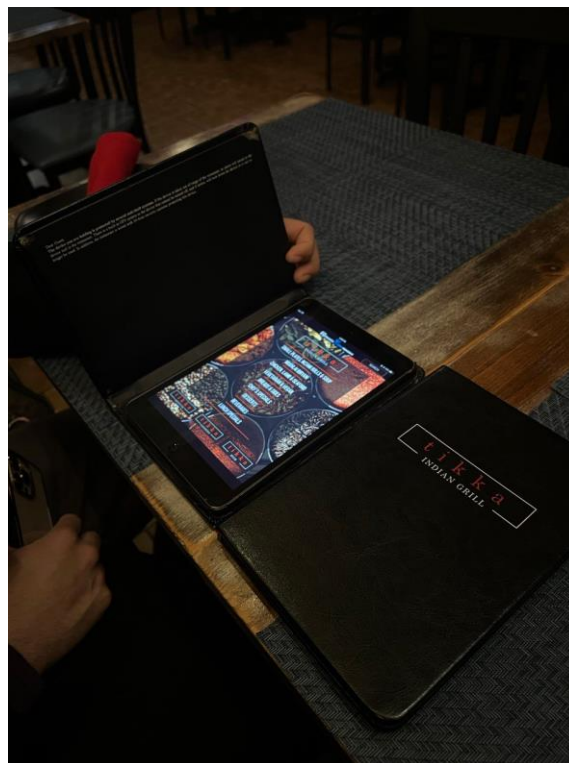


Figure 2

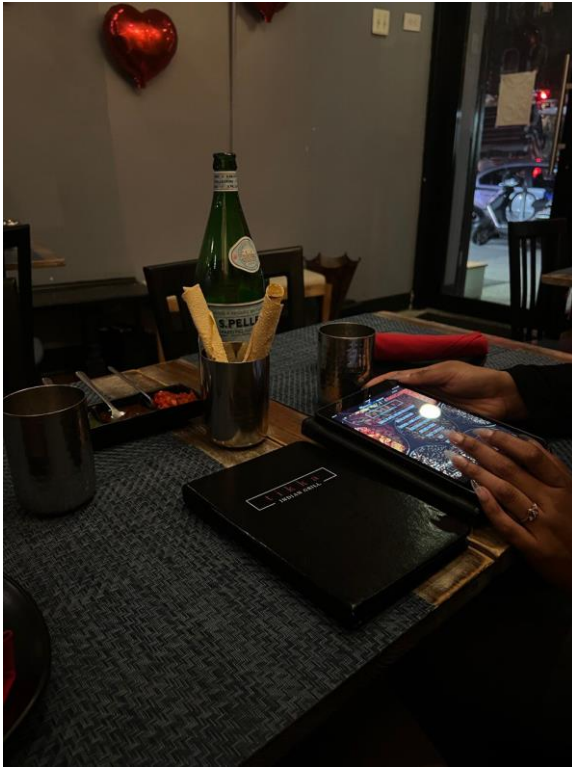


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

References

Figure 1. “India Map and Satellite Image.” *Geology*, 2023, <https://geology.com/world/india-satellite-image.shtml>.

Figures 2-6. Shana Cromwell Ramnarain “Indian Authentic Dinner Images.” *Tikka Indian Grill*. February 20th 2023.

Gidwani, B., Bhattacharya, R., Shukla, S. S., & Pandey, R. K. (2022). Indian spices: past, present and future challenges as the engine for bio-enhancement of drugs: impact of COVID-19. *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*, 102(8), 3065-3077.

Grill , Tikka Indian. “Authentic Indian Cuisine.” 2023, *Tikka Indian Grill*
<https://www.tikkaindiangrill.com/>.

Illinois, University Library. “South Asian Countries.” 2022 *International and Area Studies Library*,
https://www.library.illinois.edu/ias/sacollection/sa_countries/.

Sternquist, B., & Goldsmith, E. B. (2018). *International retailing*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

