

The View review

Annie Bullen

savours the flavours at Rimjhim



**Rimjhim • 1 City Road • Winchester • 01962 868352 • www.rimjhim.co.uk
(also at Main Road, Colden Common, 01962 713389)**

You'll forgive me if I don't manage to eat all my pudding,' I said to the waiter. The two courses I'd already enjoyed should have been enough, but a traditional Indian soft sweetened cheese with a milky sauce had caught my eye.

If there was an award for charm, friendliness and knowledge of the food on offer, the serving staff at Rimjhim in Winchester would surely win hands down. Our waiter smiled and said simply 'I think you'll like it.' And I did.

And later that night, as I was drifting off to sleep, I was counting, not sheep, but the multiplicity of ingredients which combined to give the tremendous flavours and textures that only a talented chef can produce. Vegetables, shredded and spiced and deep fried to produce little nuggets full of flavour, blended with herbs and shaped into cakes or turned into juicy sauces to accompany main dishes; lentils, tomato and ginger cooked long and slowly to act as a base for chicken; chunks of juicy fresh mango or crisply fried parsnip 'crisps' adding colour and flavour to dishes already bursting with both.

Traditional food from the Indian sub-continent is regional – dishes that have developed over centuries, making use of local ingredients. Here in England we've taken many of these to our hearts and chicken tikka, prawn vindaloo and chicken korma have become part of our way of life. But all too often the original dish is lost under a



thick coating of cook-in sauce and there's a dreadful sameness about the food.

Not at Rimjhim. Here you'll find all the traditional ingredients from the various regions, turned into modern dishes, freshly cooked.

We arrived fairly early but others were there before us. Abdul Malique Tarafder, who opened the first Rimjhim (bet you can't guess what the name means) at Colden Common in 2005 and the Winchester branch last December, explained that he had wanted to develop contemporary Indian cooking. He had employed chefs who understood traditional dishes and could transform them, using fresh ingredients, into the sort of fusion food that is both healthy and delicious. Winchester obviously appreciates that.

Well, what did we have?

We sat, crisp white cloths and napkins, fresh flowers, a pickle tray (mango, mint and yogurt, onion and vegetable) popadums and a Cobra beer each, on the table, trying to choose. Roy went for vegetable pakora and I chose the Orissa-style chilli fried squid.

Three neat cakes of shredded vegetable, bound with a spicy batter, deep-fried and decorated with a little green sauce (made with spinach, said our waiter), a creamy vegetable sauce and an elegant tamarind squiggle, looked as good as they tasted. My squid, spicy and tender, was flavoured not only with chilli but also cumin and coriander and cooled with yoghurt.

Dom Pook Biriani is, said our waiter, a Nepalese dish. A biriani, he explained, always contains rice; this one was little chunks of lamb, pot roasted with fennel, ginger, cinnamon and long grain rice. It came with salad leaves and a dish of vegetable sauce. I identified cauliflower, carrot, aubergine,

sweet potato and courgette, but there was probably more. I think there was tomato and tamarind gave it a zesty tang. The crispy nest on the side was a heap of deep fried thinly shaved parsnip.

The tandoori chicken with black lentils, Roy's main course, arrived with a jaunty chive balancing on top. The chicken, free-range, looked spectacular and was given a juicy punch with perfectly ripe fresh mango and apple. The black lentil sauce was spiced with cardamom and, we think, ginger. Crunchy pasta-like curls were good too.

Other dishes cooked in the wood-fired tandoor oven include rack of lamb, served with a pepper and mint sauce and king prawns which have been marinated in caramelized onion and cinnamon and served with an almond saffron sauce.

Among the other dishes on the menu, we could have had sea bass with garlic, green chilli and dill, served with yoghurt and pepper sauce and spinach, grilled lobster with a herb sauce and aubergine mash, Punjabi-style spicy quails, Hydrabadi style green chicken curry or steamed chicken breast with avocado and green chilli and a tomato and basil sauce.

My little sweet cheese dumpling, you'll be pleased to hear was not wasted. It was so refreshing, I polished it off and then managed a mint tea.

And the good thing is, there's a whole menu there, waiting to be explored.

Our meal, without drinks: around £40

Rimjhim is a word found often in the poetry and literature of the Indian sub-continent and reflected in its music – it translates as the gentle sound of falling raindrops.