

## FINE DINING

# The Emperor's Club

Friday, November 02, 2012

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The dine-in version of Caesars, Al Barsha, specialises – and excels – in Indian food, while living up to common-man regality by way of atmospherics



For many of us in the UAE, Caesars has always beckoned from the bakery window: their cakes, pastries, savouries, biscuits alongside café-like snacks (breakfast, anyone?) pop up from confectionery outlets dotted all across the Emirates – and particularly in Dubai.

I'd noticed Caesars' fine-dining avatars at times – the one on Mankhool specially since it's walking distance from where I live – but never had an opportunity to visit the restaurant; so I was prepared to be surprised (simply because, occasionally, you are when you go with a pre-conceived mindset and, in this case, I had a sort of a confectionery-outlook and wanted to see what could possibly constitute The Other) when I went over to the Al Barsha dine-in outlet. And I was.

The first thing that strikes you about Caesars is the nomenclature: the juxtaposition of primarily Indian cuisine (although the restaurant calls itself 'multi-cuisine, most patrons seek out Indian food since it's clearly the mainstay, going by the bill of fare and the number of orders clocked in) alongside a throwback to an era when the Romans ruled (Julius Caesar, Octavius Caesar?). All contradictions are drowned the moment you are enveloped in a sense of regality (in keeping with the 'emperor' theme): the opulent interiors, the overstated elegance, the deferent service – and the many seating quarters (there is the main dining area, and there is a host of other private rooms where you can enjoy a discreet meal with family or friends).

The restaurant was almost packed – a good sign considering it was a weekday afternoon, and a pointer to how much business it must be conducting during evenings and over weekends.

There is a smattering of Persian and 'Western' items on the menu that is dominated by an exhaustive Indian spread, followed closely by a Chinese invasion.

Even though I knew I had to go back to work, I couldn't resist the mango lime lassi as my preferred poison: it was expectedly heavy but worth every bit of the baggage.

My smart-alecky line for the afternoon was, "So, how's your Caesar's Salad?" For that, I had to tuck into one: the dressing was a bit too intense, and it's definitely not a good idea to have it as an 'appetiser' because you are bound to feel up to the gills.

Next up: sesame prawns on toast and mushroom pepper chilli, both of which were wonderfully Indianised Chinese samplings – and lovely on the palate. Indian starters followed: the fish koliwada and the murgh angaare, both cooked to perfection but, technically, too heavy to be had before the 'real' lunch.



For mains, it was the Indian heartland that triumphed: daal fry (pleasant and homely enough), palak paneer (one of the best I've ever had), butter chicken (again, excellent and a signature dish at Caesars), bhuna ghost (I wish it had been drier), murgh shahjahani (delicious) and a basket of freshly made breads, including a crispy roomali roti with lashings of clarified butter.

Time for desserts. Even though I had eaten enough for a week, I tried out the malai kulfi, which was average – but it was totally overcompensated by the yummy gulab jamuns. A cup of post-prandial masala tea followed, and it was the nicest possible ending to a hearty meal.

My next question was if the Mankhool restaurant (it has the same menu) does home delivery; I was rewarded with a resounding 'yes'. I'm going to be inviting Caesars over at home one of these days. I came, I saw... and was conquered.

[sushmita@khaleejtimes.com](mailto:sushmita@khaleejtimes.com)