

eat & drink



LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE

worth a trip

Chicken balochi tikka (\$14.99) and paratha (99 cents)

Meerath Kabab House Chicago, 2657 W. Devon Ave. 773-274-9430

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

If you've ever hankered for a side of mozzarella sticks with your chicken tikka or fries with a mango lassi, you're usually S.O.L. But chef Muhammad Ali Maniya, a veteran of Devon Avenue's Bundoo Khan, is changing that by serving up a handful of American fast-food staples alongside classic Pakistani kebabs and stir-fries at a new spot called Meerath Kabab House Chicago.

At the no-frills banquet-sized store bathed in a coat of sunburst-yellow paint, Maniya and his cooks form and mix meat and spices, slap kebab patties on metal skewers and grill them to order. Be forewarned: Because these kebabs aren't pre-formed and waiting

around, orders take a while to make it to your table.

But the reward is silky, juicy, slightly charred meat that's bursting with chili and onion. No dish at Meerath, however, is more succulent than mahogany-colored, crispy-

skinned hunks of luscious chicken dripping in hot chili oil tossed with green chilis and golden fried strips of fragrant ginger. It's called chicken balochi tikka, and it's served tableside in a sizzling bowl. The sides of the bowl and chicken are covered in a salty garam masala spice blend that I ended up scraping off the sides and eating solo once the chicken was gone. The fried ginger had an addictive French fry-like quality, and I ended up digging deep into the dish to rescue any remaining bits. I considered ordering a packet of the stuff to go.

Unlike chicken tikka—which seems to be nearly everywhere in India, Pakistan, the UK and your neighborhood Indian or Pakistani joint—chicken balochi tikka is a dish typically served at 24-hour roadside stands called dhabas. Dhabas are a bit like the Pakistani or Indian equivalent of American highway

diners that cater to burly long-haul truckers. Only chicken-fried steak cutlets sopping with congealed white gravy are replaced with rich aromatic dal and heavenly roasted meats.

Just as hipsters have fetishized old-timey American diners, Pakistani and Indian families now belly up for a taste of rich kebabs at the dhabas. If you want to replicate that experience, ask for a side of Meerath's paratha, spoon some of the chicken balochi tikka into the center and wrap it up like a little burrito. Unlike pillowy naan, paratha is flaky like a perfect pie crust and dappled with brown bits from the tandoor. After a few bites, you'll feel like you're keeping it dhaba real.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.

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