

## **Asha's Indian Bar and Restaurant**



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By Paul Fulford, Birmingham Mail

IT'S one of the fallacies of our fame-obsessed age that celebrities are unfailingly admirable and that their lifestyles are not only desirable, but are attainable by purchasing a product with which they are associated.

It was therefore with trepidation that I headed to Asha, a new Indian restaurant connected with the Bollywood star Asha Bhosle.

The unease wasn't helped by the knowledge that this restaurant was the first British outpost of a franchise operation based in Dubai.

Shows how wrong I can be because this was one of the most pleasant dining experiences I've had this year.

I'm not going to pretend that the food - though very good - was the most amazing I've eaten this year. But the whole package - decor, ambience, service and what we ate - made this a very enjoyable evening.

The spacious premises used to house a bar and nightclub and have been refurbished with imagination, the rich colours, subdued lighting and partitions creating a welcoming, intimate and sophisticated atmosphere.

Service was gracious, efficient and helpful to such an extent that the waiter thoughtfully advised us to order less food than we'd greedily planned.

Poppadoms were brought unordered to the table I shared with my wife Lynn and son Ewan and, with three excellent relishes, set the standard for a high class meal.

Ewan and I then shared a platter of samosas, the pastry of which was thicker, softer and more enjoyable than I'd previously encountered.

The vegetable samosa was good, but the meat one was better - impressively ungreasy minced lamb packed tightly almost in the style of a highly spiced Scotch pie.

Lynn's paneer salad - the cheese soft, crumbly and flavoursome - also won praise.

My main course - nally gosht - was another winner.

A meltingly tender lamb shank came in a yoghurt and saffron gravy in which the individual spices exploded with flavour.

Lynn's chicken curry, in a sauce spiked with coriander seed and cashew nuts, was well-executed. Likewise Ewan's mutton korma.

A shared bowl of plainly-steamed rice provided perfect ballast. Neither wanted dessert, but regretted their decision when my rosewater panna cotta arrived.

Purists may have objected to the incredibly runny texture of the panna cotta, but its heady, flowery fragrance led me to forgive this textural transgression.

It came on top of a layer of strawberry jelly and with marinated dates smudged with dense chocolate.

Our eye-catchingly low bill also included a couple of exotic Martini cocktails and various other drinks.

**How much?** £65. **Vegetarians?** Choices. **Disabled access?** OK. **Child friendly?** Yes.

**Parking?** On street. **Go back?** Can't wait. **Where?** 12-22 Newhall Street, Birmingham. 0121 200 2767.