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GLOBE NORTH DINING OUT

Kebab's offerings are good to go

July 31, 2011

The Kebab Factory

414 Washington St.

Somerville

617-354-4996

www.thekebabfactory.net

Hours: Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon to 11 p.m.

Major credit cards accepted

Accessible to the handicapped

Among the foodies on Yelp and Chowhound, the Kebab Factory in Somerville draws frequent criticism for its too-tight quarters, and the resulting communal-dining-with-strangers experience.

So, deterred by visions of uncomfortably cramped dining, I opted for takeout. And although the Kebab Factory's space is modern and attractive, I can certainly see it being claustrophobic at capacity: Seating for 40 is crammed into a space not much larger than the typical living room.

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This roadhouse food is a mixed bag

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The food traveled well, making it home largely intact. Upon unpacking, I discovered I'd scored complimentary orders of tomato shorba (\$3.95), a creamy tomato soup with a bit of spicy kick (appealing even on a sweltering day); cracker-like pappadums (\$1.95); and a small order of dal makhani (\$12.95 as an entrée), a surprisingly buttery lentil stew.

The dahi key kebab (\$6.95), described on the appetizer menu as a "yogurt, exotic nuts and cheese kebab," bore no resemblance to any kebab I'd seen before. (In fact, I thought it had been omitted from my order until I cut into what I thought was a breaded potato croquette and molten cheese oozed out.) Kebab-like or not, it was yummy, similar in taste to a stuffed jalapeno.

The combo vegetarian platter (\$7.95) was a rather conventional array of fried Indian appetizers. Among the items included, the vegetable pakora (\$4.95 as a stand-alone appetizer), fritters of shredded vegetables in a chickpea batter, was pleasantly sweet, with an almost maple flavor. The aloo tikki (\$3.95 as an appetizer), fried potato patties, were fatter than most, made of mashed potatoes rather than the more conventional sliced potatoes.

Also tasty - although no doubt highly fattening - was a side of bread called sheermal (\$4.95), made with clarified butter. Best eaten in small quantities, it paired nicely with the yogurt-based Indian condiment known as raita (\$1.95). This raita was more tart than most, which I enjoyed.

Given the Kebab Factory's focus, I felt compelled to select some barbecued meat from the menu. Two of these entrées were chicken kebabs: the kali mirch ke tikkey (\$14.95), boneless chicken dipped in cream cheese and crushed pepper before cooking, and the chapli kebab (\$13.95), flavored with pomegranate seeds.

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