

food wednesday

By Ellen Bhang
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

What Rokeya Chowdhury likes best about owning a restaurant is being a part of a neighborhood. In the dozen years that she and her husband, Solmon, have owned Shanti, a Northern Indian and Bangladeshi eatery in Dorchester (they also own Asian tapas restaurant Moksa in Cambridge) customers have become friends. "We know couples who were dating when they started coming to the restaurant, and now they bring their kids," she says.

The restaurateur wanted to duplicate that sense of community in Roslindale, which she likes for its small-town feel. In March, Shanti became the first Indian restaurant to set up shop in Roslindale Village, where Cafe Rialto used to be. This newest outpost of Shanti ("peace" in Sanskrit), offers a serene 40-seat spot on Washington Street. Buddhist statues gaze out from shelving mounted on terra-cotta colored walls. Chef Anand "Andy" Pokhrel, who trained in Nepal and worked on Nantucket before coming to Shanti Dorchester eight years ago, oversees the same menu at both locations.

A Bangladeshi dish called bhuna is one you rarely see. Rokeya Chowdhury describes how whole spices are toasted, ground, then sauteed with onion to release flavor and fragrance. Meat and vegetables are added to the pan and cooked over low heat without additional liquid, resulting in a robust dish. Chowdhury, originally from Bangladesh, says she loves cooking this way at home. To that end, the dish made with fork-tender bone-in chunks of goat (\$12.95) is infused with spices like coriander, green cardamom, turmeric, ginger, and more.

For non-meat eaters (Roslindale customers request vegetarian and vegan options more frequently than Dorchester patrons) Shanti excels at vegetable-centric fare. In begun bharta (\$11.95), eggplant is smoked, mashed smooth, and



Clockwise (from top left): goat bhuna at Shanti; (from left) general manager Mahesh Shahi, owners Solmon and Rokeya Chowdhury, and chef Anand Pokhrel; bhindi masala.

PHOTOS BY KAYANA SZYMCAK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

CHEAP EATS

DINING DEALS IN GREATER BOSTON

Roslindale Shanti excels at Indian and Bangladeshi fare

cooked in mustard oil with tomato and onion. The silky-savory character of this dish has us spooning second and third helpings onto our plates. Same for a delicious bhindi masala (\$11.95), diced, dainty baby okra also cooked with tomato and onion. Okra's slipperiness here is tamed by flash-frying.

Both vegetarian and meat dishes rotate on a daily lunch buffet (\$8.95 per diner), available in addition to the regular menu. Aloo chole is a favorite

dish one Sunday, soft-cooked chickpeas with saucy chunks of potato, gently spiced with cumin (this lunch buffet item does not appear on the menu, but Chowdhury says it can be made for dinner by special request). We also like bright red tandoori chicken and flavorful curried beef. A hearty vegetable samosa, its pastry golden from a fat bath, is amply stuffed with potatoes and peas. Our one disappointment is that we're not allowed to take home the rest of the naan

on our table. Chowdhury says this policy is in place because some guests fill their plates to take home leftovers, which hurts business. The restaurant offers the value-priced buffet, she says, for customers to try new dishes.

Subsequent visits yield missteps. Field greens in a salad are withered to an unappetizing brown. On another visit, our server doesn't offer to find out whether a dish contains dairy. We chalk these up to a new loca-

tion working out kinks.

On a warm weekend night, we are among several couples and families with kids in the dining room. Mixed vegetable pakoras (\$4.95), fritters made of green and red pepper, slivered onion, and whole leaf cilantro, are crispy with a golden chickpea batter. These toothsome bundles should be dipped into the three traditional chutneys that accompany the meal — spicy onion, sweet tamarind, and cooling mint.

Mulligatawny soup (\$3.95), with yellow lentils, vegetable broth, and turmeric, is a mild version of the popular dish (perhaps a little longer on the flame might have enhanced the flavor and creaminess). Cauliflower and bell pepper with cumin, chili, and coriander cooks down to a thick, slightly sweet sauce in a dish called jhalfrezie (\$12.95). We get ours with chicken (lamb, beef, goat, or shrimp are also on offer), and it's a winner with the plain basmati rice that accompanies all saucy dishes.

By now we're wondering who in the dining room is dating and will someday return with a baby in tow. We'll have to come back often to find out.

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SHANTI
4197 Washington St.,
Roslindale,
www.shantiboston.com.
All major cards accepted.
Wheelchair accessible.
Prices Appetizers \$3.95-
\$9.95. Soups, salads, breads
\$2.95-\$12.95. Vegetarian,
meat, and seafood dishes
\$10.95-\$17.95.
Desserts \$3.95.
Hours Mon-Sun Lunch 11:30
a.m.-3 p.m., Dinner 5-10 p.m.
Liquor None.
What to order Mixed
vegetable pakoras
(fritters), bhindi masala
(spiced okra), begun bharta
(smoked mashed eggplant),
goat bhuna and chicken
jhalfrezie (meat and poultry
in flavorful sauces).