

Moti Mahal, Pioneers of Indian Cuisine, Announce Grand Entry in Europe with Culinary Maestro Shri Kundan Lal Gujral

Moti Mahal, founded in 1920, is a culinary haven with a legacy of 103 years. Recognised as the birthplace of Butter Chicken and Dal Makhani.

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Tandoori Artistry In Delhi

By JAMES TRAUB

Perhaps the only good thing that can be said for the bloody struggle that followed the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947 is that it forced the great tandoori cooks, who were Hindu, to flee from places like Peshawar, near the Afghanistan border, where they were throwing away their sikans and kebabs on British air force officers, to the Indian capital of Delhi, where they set the food-loving world on its ear.

The first to set up shop was Kundan Lal, and his cousin, also Kundan Lal. The two of them, along with their family's jewelry, and opened up a dhaba, or roadside diner, on a crowded street in Old Delhi. Most of the restaurants in Delhi at the time were owned by the British and served what was described as British fare. Indian restaurants were primarily vegetarian. Delhi was ripe, not to say desperate, for this tandoori restaurant, whose name was Moti Mahal. Within a year, the Nehru family, including daughter Indira Gandhi, had become regular customers.

The older Kundan Lal, who is portly, florid, somewhat dour in manner and careful in dress, and possessed of splendid mustache sticks off the sides of his head and hands of state who regularly arrived at his restaurant's quite sophisticated puritan. Peace treaties were hammered out in the kitchen. And M. Masood Azad, the great Mianster leader, reportedly told the Shah of Iran that while in India he must make two visits — to the Taj Mahal and Moti Mahal.

The innovation that attracted these grandees — who, incidentally, sat in their cars rather than mix it up with the hordes on the sidewalk — was the tandoori pit. While the Moghul, or Moghul, cuisine which had dominated North Indian cooking, is fried on the stove, tandoori meat or bread is baked in a cylindrical clay oven sunk into the earth. The clay surface keeps everything dry and crisp.

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Fare of the Country



Indian bread, or naan, being prepared by workers in the Moti Mahal restaurant

The tandoori trail

Delhi dhabas are a specialty of the tandoori trail, which serve memorable tandoori dishes. The following is a selection.

The aptly named **Have More Restaurant** (13 Pandara Road Market, New Delhi 110003; telephone 36777) makes a great tandoori fish, while the **Khyber Restaurant** (1/1514 Karamnagar, New Delhi 110003; telephone 33807) is famous for its lamb dishes, especially its succulent ribs, which must be ordered in advance. The ribs at both of these restaurants, as at **Moti Mahal** (2701 Netaji Subhash Marg, Darya Gani, New Delhi 110002; telephone 373841 and 373842) will run about \$4 a person. They dhabas like the restaurant in the **Khalo da Hotel** (74 Municipal Market, Connaught Corner, New Delhi 110001; telephone 4608) serve meals in the \$2 range. And the hill at the **Bahara** (Mansarovar Palace, Connaught Corner, New Delhi 110001; telephone 23873), Extension 1073 runs between \$1 and \$2 a person, without drink.

All of these restaurants are open year round, generally until midnight, but the **Moti Mahal** is closed Mondays.

Normally here is recommended as the proper accompaniment for tandoori dishes, but in the better restaurants one can order Indian or imported wine, hard liquor or soft drinks.

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while the circular air flow, so they claim, is uniform cooking.

A tandoori kitchen is a primitive affair. At Moti Mahal a pair of lean youths in white undershirts sit cross-legged behind a pair of tandoori pits. The pits are fired by wood that is left to burn overnight, and the cooks regulate the heat by stuffing wads of paper into a secondary hole that supplies air. The fellow who makes the most keeps next to him skewers of chicken, chops and kebabs, string on a skewer. The lower skewers are the pit all at once, to prevent overcooking, and made of 12 skewers or so, they rotate.

It is the bread man, though, who seems to do the really skilled labor. First, he fashions the dough into shape, taking a nip at one end to form the familiar triangular shape of the naan. A really skilled craftsman can flip the dough around like a globe maker, until he has a vast, thin wafer about two feet from nose to tail and 18 inches across the wings — the so-called "family naan." Then he moves his creation and flips it again, the side of the eye. One it has become and he's out and out, discharging, with one long, swift, proud, catches it with another, and flips it out of the pit. In the kitchen of a really busy tandoori restaurant you can see these rods flying and clicking like a pair of pistons knitting needles.

What changes from these acrobatic breads is that in softness, it is soft as a piece of paper, but it is wrapped around a piece of meat without breaking. The crisp and firm on its underside where it baked against the clay. Naan is also available with potato or chicken or ground beef mixed into the dough, but this seems like a bit of a gimmick. The bread, after all, is a staple of Indian cuisine, and tandoori restaurants, in general, discouraged an ungratified intrusion between flavor and flavor.

But it is, in fact, the most that tandoori has to offer. In New Delhi into the kitchen of Old Delhi, Tandoori meat is dry — and yellow (the chicken is like, for example, *Arghavachicken*), a check of meat surrounded (it is) in a piece of tandoori, usually *Arghavachicken*, garlic, ginger, coriander, turmeric and chili, yogurt and whatever else the chef feels is in order. The chicken may be slowly baked so that it is half done when ordered. Then it will be plunged for a few minutes into the tandoori pit.

It emerges, in the best of all possible restaurants, light pink in the center, crisp on the outside, slightly smoky throughout, and with a fine mist of steam still clinging to the outside. It is pungent, with a hint of coriander, rather than hot, with chili. One should give in, after the first bite of fiery meat, or tender chicken, to the sudden desire to weep; India is an emotional country, after all.

But tandoori is a sturdy frontier cuisine, crafted though it may have become. You can always order a bank of animal instead of little pieces. A few restaurants, including the undisputed tandoori Viceroy, the *Mansarovar* hotel's *Bahara*, serve an entire leg of lamb, known as *Arghavachicken*. This magnificent specimen looks like the drumstick of a bronze statue. The meat has been left on the bone, but cut into thick slices, so that you hear your way while the two glowing white bones around a joint. On a recent visit, two proper ladies were observed yodeling off one between them at an afternoon sitting.

Those who hunger for the best, unadorned tandoori can venture even deeper into the heart of Old Delhi, where even the agile three-wheeled rickshaws scarcely venture. There, in Ferozpur, behind the great mosque, the *Jama Masjid*, a few ground, unadorned tandoori — *Moti Mahal*, circa 1947 — can be found. At one of these, the *Khalo da Hotel*, a famous din of slapping comes from the kitchen, as from a crude pole interrogation. The grunts, click like meat. Waiters dash back and forth from the tandoori kitchen in the back to the gas cylinder in the front — a distance of about 15 feet — clicking, serving chickens in their own words. I have seen one waiter almost strike another with one of these roasted chickens. But no matter. Some sense of that tandoori poetry in the flurry of butter and naan and cold spices, and a reasonable man will overlook the details. Well, indeed, how to the background music of tandoori bread and

Amsterdam, Netherlands Feb 4, 2024 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Moti Mahal, the esteemed culinary institution, proudly traces its roots back to 1920, when visionary chef Shri Kundan Lal Gujral laid the foundation in Peshawar, undivided India. Celebrating a remarkable journey of innovation and gastronomic excellence, Moti Mahal has become synonymous with the rich tapestry of North Indian cuisine.

In its inception, Shri Kundan Lal Gujral pioneered the art of Tandoori cuisine, introducing the world to the iconic Tandoori Chicken. The distinctive flavours of Moti Mahal's Tandoori creations set a new standard in Indian gastronomy. As the culinary landscape evolved, so did Moti Mahal, diversifying its offerings and introducing culinary delights like the legendary Butter Chicken and Dal Makhani.

The Partition of India in 1947 saw Moti Mahal relocate to Delhi, and the brand continued to flourish under the visionary leadership of Shri Kundan Lal Gujral. Over the years, Moti Mahal's popularity

soared, attracting global acclaim for its commitment to authenticity and culinary innovation.

Moti Mahal's legacy expands beyond its origin, reaching international shores and captivating the taste buds of diverse cultures. Today, Moti Mahal stands as a testament to a century of culinary mastery, with its recipes handed down through generations, preserving the authenticity and heritage of its offerings.

As Moti Mahal continues to evolve, it remains committed to providing an unparalleled dining experience, blending tradition with innovation. The legacy lives on, inviting food enthusiasts to savour a century of exquisite flavours that have stood the test of time.

Moti Mahal, the venerable culinary institution with a century-long legacy, is set to make waves in the Netherlands with an ambitious expansion plan. In a strategic move, Moti Mahal announces its merger with Soebedar Investments, a partnership poised to elevate the brand's presence in the Dutch culinary landscape said Mr. Ashim Gujral the Managing Director of Moti Mahal Restaurants.

The expansion plan involves a thoughtfully designed space that captures the essence of Moti Mahal's rich culinary heritage while embracing the cultural tapestry of the Netherlands. The ambiance will seamlessly blend traditional Indian aesthetics with contemporary design elements, creating a unique dining atmosphere and Signature dishes from Moti Mahal's Indian repertoire will stand alongside carefully curated international offerings, ensuring a diverse and satisfying dining experience.

"We are excited to bring the legacy of Moti Mahal to the Netherlands, offering a unique culinary experience that transcends borders," said [Mr. Ashim Gujral/ Mr. Kuvam Gujral], the grandson and great grandson of Shri Kundan Lal Gujral "Our world cuisine menu reflects a harmonious blend of global influences, ensuring a delightful journey for our patrons."

Moti Mahal invites the community to join in the celebration of this culinary milestone, experiencing the intersection of authentic Indian cuisine and international culinary innovation. Stay tuned for more updates and announcements as we prepare to open our doors to the Netherlands this autumn.

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