

Dish Omaha – June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Jeff:** It's time for Dish Omaha, featuring none other than KDNO's resident foodie, Diane Watson. There she is, Diane.

**Diane:** Hi Jeff.

**Jeff:** Hey.

**Diane:** Today we're talking about Indian food, and I want to ask you if you remember the first time you had Indian food.

**Jeff:** 100 percent. Jaipur in Rockbrook.

**Diane:** Oh. Very nice.

**Jeff:** And that's, they were one of the first ones to do homebrew or microbrew.

**Diane:** That's exactly right.

**Jeff:** And I remember I used to enjoy jalapeno beer. I don't think I can do that now, but it was really, really good.

**Diane:** At least you can say you did. Well, Indian food became popular in the U.S., not until the 70s and 80s. The first restaurants were part of a migration, not surprising, New York, San Francisco, Chicago. In 2010, they really kind of hit their stride. But I will tell you that the first Indian restaurant in Omaha was the Indian Oven back in 1984. And it was the first Indian restaurant between Chicago and Denver.

**Jeff:** Really?

**Diane:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Wow.

**Diane:** There are now about 48, by my count, Indian restaurants in Nebraska, a couple dozen here in Omaha.

**Jeff:** What? Wow.

**Diane:** 10,000 across the country. So, it's a very popular cuisine. Jaipur, which you mentioned, was probably the second. That opened in 1992. And some of the most popular around here, Maharajah in West Omaha, Kanara in Regency, Star India, Saffron, if you've been there, kind of a recent addition in Aksarben Village.

**Jeff:** I've heard good things.

**Diane:** Flavors is downtown.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Diane:** Taste of India, which relocated. And there's lots of other small ones all over the city to try. The greatest thing I think about Indian food is the techniques are centuries old. And they incorporate so many native spices and flavors. 70% of all spices in the world can be found in India. So, that just brings such rich flavor.

**Jeff:** Yeah. And the color.

**Diane:** Yes.

**Jeff:** The color of the spices sometimes.

**Diane:** I absolutely agree. The importance for Indian food preparers is balance, aroma, texture, and then regional diversity. And I think a lot of people are scared off of Indian food thinking it's all spicy. It's not.

**Jeff:** It's not. No.

**Diane:** No. And if you haven't tried it, or if you're an expert, I think there's always help to be had.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Diane:** Whether you take a friend, somebody obviously, well probably, took you to an Indian restaurant and said, try this.

**Jeff:** That is 100% true.

**Diane:** Most of the time, people don't venture in by themselves. And then I have found the folks that work there are more than happy to steer you toward what makes you happy.

**Jeff:** I feel like I've become more adventurous with my eating.

**Diane:** Same.

**Jeff:** And honestly, that experience at Jaipur was one of those experiences. It's like, wait a minute.

**Diane:** Informed.

**Jeff:** Yeah. Exactly.

**Diane:** Probably how you approach food.

**Jeff:** 100%.

**Diane:** So, some of the most common spices are turmeric, which is earthy and slightly bitter. It's known for that golden color. That's probably the one you were talking about.

**Jeff:** Good for you. Yes.

**Diane:** Anti-inflammatory properties. Cumin, or cumin, depending on how you say it. It's kind of a nutty and warm flavor used in both whole seed and ground forms. Coriander is a little citrusy, light, paired with cumin often, and those seeds produce cilantro. A lot of folks don't know that. And then garam masala is a blend of warming spices like cinnamon and cloves and cardamom, and it's added for aroma. And it's kind of like curry. Families do their own blends that are passed down through the generations.

**Jeff:** I love that, though.

**Diane:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** That connection to family.

**Diane:** Me too.

**Jeff:** Yeah. That's wonderful.

**Diane:** And it's very regionalized. The food from North India is probably the most common that we see on menus, but there are different styles in Southeast and West, and each one has a different flavor profile. So, if you're thinking about trying Indian food, I've got a couple of popular dishes that you could consider. Tandoori chicken is marinated in yogurt, cumin, coriander, and that garam masala, and it's slow-cooked in one of those tandoor ovens...

**Jeff:** Oh sure. Yum!

**Diane:** ... that we've seen are kind of cone-shaped, and it's very smoky. Butter chicken, probably the most common. It's got a creamy tomato-based curry with the tender chicken, and it's usually served with naan, which is the Indian bread or rice. One thing I love about it is it's not a very old traditional food. It was kind of come up within the 20th century from leftover tandoori chicken. So as leftover chef, I love anything that uses leftovers.

**Jeff:** Perfect. (laughter)

**Diane:** And chicken 65, you'll see that on menus. That's a spicy and tangy deep-fried chicken. It's an appetizer, starter. It's got its name because it was the 65th menu item on menu when it was created.

**Jeff:** Oh, that's awesome.

**Diane:** So, a lot of folks always think it's got something magical, like, oh, was it chopped in 65 pieces or marinated for 65 days? No, 65. So you can get help, but I would say if you haven't tried Indian, go with an experienced friend. You can't go wrong.

**Jeff:** Oh, I love it. Thanks so much, Diane Watson, KVNO's resident foodie for Dish Omaha.

**Diane:** See you next week.