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Trade Journal for the Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Industry



Diva of Italian Cuisine

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A look at the shifting sands of the catering sector

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As the festive fever looks set to catch on, the food & beverage industry is particularly upbeat about the business prospects ahead. People eat out more often with their friends and families during the holidays and on festive occasions than on the regular days. Foodservice operators, restaurateurs and other F&B players are naturally optimistic, anticipating higher sales and better revenue in the months ahead. In general, the volume of all products increase during the festive season with the overall F&G business ratcheting up by 25-40 per cent led by chocolates, dry fruits, juices, sweets, biscuits, namkeens, etc.

In this season of spending, gifting and indulgence, old favourite mithai gift packs still call the shots. Estimates put almost 65 per cent of the gifting market to be dominated by mithai gift packs and its sales tick up close to 40 per cent during the festivities. Signature sweet products bring in good numbers while sales of healthier sugar-free range of sweets, nuts and dry fruits also peak during this period. In categories like chocolates, the leaders come out with new, interesting options and variants to enhance sales. For those who want to try something different, there are other food gifts aplenty: cheddar cheese cakes, Dutch cocoa brownies, fudge brownie bites, choco chip cookies, to name just a few. Sunrise categories like olive oils, highend gourmet confectionery, wines, exotic chocolates, and international cuisine ingredients are the favourite of those who wish to gift something really special and surprise the end receiver. Sales of fast foods like pizza and burgers and those of beverages and juices also perk up appreciably.

We hope that some of this spending fervour will touch and lift the spirits of the QSR industry in particular and the foodservice business in general, which have been facing some headwinds of late due to rising costs and stickiness in pricing. The coming months hold a great opportunity for lifting all business boats and we hope that it will buoy up the sentiments of all segments of the foodservice industry. Cheers!

Amitabh Taneja

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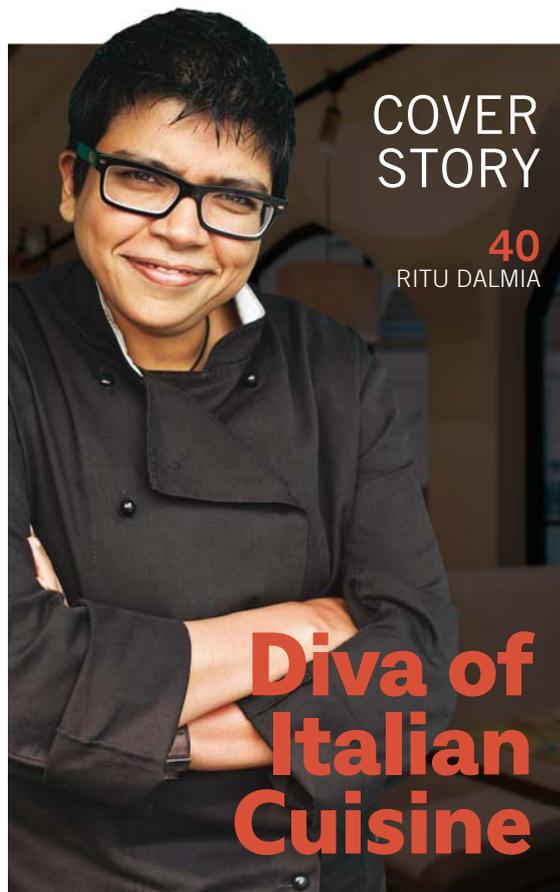
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Diva of Italian Cuisine

Kolkata and the Changing Platter

Much has changed since Calcutta paved way for Kolkata. Consumerism has hit the city in every possible way as is evident from the growing number of shopping malls, one-stop shops and swanky restaurants, and the spread of global cuisine to the heart of the city.

by Ritusmita Biswas



From Nahbat to DJ

Once upon a time, entering the venue of a Bengali wedding would mean diving into a 'pandal' overflowing with the fragrance of fresh Jasmine and the tuberose paired heavenly with the aroma of fried foods like Fish Fry or 'Luchi' from the menu. The 'nahbat' with its beautiful rendition of flute and 'shehnai' created the magical ambiance while Punjabi and dhoti clad Babus and Benarasi or Jamdani clad ladies chatted heartily, while the host or the 'Karta' made hurricane trips from the Mandap, to the Food station, taking care of everything.

The scene today in Kolkata has changed radically. Weddings are mostly arranged by 'event organizers' and the Pandal has been conveniently replaced by Banquet Halls. The transformation has not stopped there. The 'Nahbat' has been replaced by much peppier and quirkier DJs as the gentlemen in suits and ladies in anything from sarees and Lehengas to gowns dance their heart out with the host as well. The age old Biye Bari is gradually inching towards a much globalised Wedding Party in posh Banquet Halls. The Journey is not limited to the venue itself. The food which has always been the centre to the lives of every Kolkatans (not necessary Bengali), has undergone massive change when it comes to Bengali weddings. The delectable fish fries or the deliciously inflated 'Luchis' are fast replaced by Chicken Fries or Pasta Salads. The meal itself is now divided by starters and main course, replacing the good old 'Jol Khabar'.

Biye Bari Pandal vs. Banquet Halls

The typical Kolkatan 'babus' are gradually vanishing away. The Kolkatan babus today would rather sway to the groovy numbers, and taste the world served on their plate. As a result of this changing taste, the older markets have undergone a sea change. The transformation is quite transparent and is continuing; even the wedding market has metamorphosed over the years. Gone are the days, when relatives used to throng the wedding house, days before the original occasion. Weddings are now better planned and obviously better executed with the number of well-equipped banquet halls in Kolkata.

After a couple gets engaged, the excitement paves way for further plans for wedding. Of course, there are thousands of events and small functions which need to be planned in between. Most women today do their research about wedding themes online. Yes these days, even weddings in Kolkata revolve around a theme, tying all the rituals and events in a single string. A common trend these days is to hire a wedding planner who will not only plan details about the D-day, but will take all the headaches associated with the function. Says Yuvraj Singh Johar of Shloka Events a premier wedding management company which has arranged various events including that of Sahid Kapoor and Mira Rajput: "The wedding theme today needs to be innovative and in most



cases classy. The same applies to food menu and a lot of innovations are being done in this arena. As one of the premier event managers in the country we strive to provide innovative menu to all our clientele."

In fact today the couple just needs to be present for the ceremony. One of the first things that a wedding planner does is to check the most suitable venue as per the budget of the couple. And here enters the Banquet Halls which are tailor-made for all kinds of functions associated with wedding. There are myriad banquet options in Kolkata – right from the options in star hotels to stand alone halls – the city has banquets of every shape and size for the clientele. In south Kolkata popular stand alone venues for example include the Sudesh Bhawan, to Panache in Homeland mall among others while popular outdoor venues include the Horticulture society, Nalban to name a few. "Based on the budget and theme of the wedding a venue selection is usually done," says Mr. Johar.

The Culinary Change Across The Domains

While for sure the event structure in weddings have changed – what has changed the most is food. For sure it cannot be denied that the point of interest however in any function is definitely the Food. People may forget and forgive everything, when the food is good. Today, in Kolkata a standard wedding menu is

As a result of the changing taste, the older markets have undergone a sea change. The transformation is quite transparent and is continuing; even the wedding market has metamorphosed over the years.

Playing with pots and pans

In a candid conversation with FoodService India, Chef Inder Dev of Fortune Select expresses his views on the various culinary cultures and his most preferred style of innovative cooking.

by Nibedita Roy



Tell us how you came to step into the world of foodservice and whether it was by accident or design.

My family was into the hospitality business. I was 11 when I got fascinated seeing chefs mixing ingredients and playing with pots and pans. So the passion started at an early age, and soon my dream came true.

Who were your career mentors?

Khana Khazana fame chef Sanjeev Kapoor, chef Manjit Singh Gill, chef Satish Arora and chef Sanjay Sharma were my key mentors.

How do you define your cuisine?

Initially I was taken up with cooking tasty food at home, and then preparing healthy food during my stint in the family business of hospital catering. But later I realised that cuisine was a vast subject which calls for excellent and special skills, an innovative brain, lots of dedication, hard work and the ability to understand the art of matching and mixing ingredients scientifically. My cuisine is definitely Indian, which itself has huge varieties. After graduating in Hotel Management in 1990, I took to some intense travelling in many countries. Now, with 26 years of experience under my belt, I can call the world cuisine as my cuisine.

Which culinary styles have influenced your career?

Though every culinary style has its own importance and the scientific reasons behind it, what impressed me was the 'Dum' style of cooking. It was very enthralling to see how perfectly the food gets cooked in a sealed pot and the way it looks and taste after it has been cooked. Also, I liked the pot roasting style of cooking in which food gets infused with herbs and other flavours, which makes it appealing and delicious.

What twists or accents do you love to incorporate into your dishes?

People call me a fusion master chef. I have created dishes, which are simply out-of-the box. Some of them are 'lotus root ki jalebi', 'missi roti pizza', 'Thai curried dal vada', 'dahi kebab ki chaat', 'olive chicken tikka', 'apple ishtew', 'biryani ke parathe', 'rasogola ki chaat', and gulab jamun baked with

Diva of Italian Cuisine

In an exclusive tête-à-tête with Charu Lamba for FoodService India, Ritu Dalmia opens up on the major learnings she has had in her journey from chef to restropreneur.



Ritu Dalmia

Super chef, leading restaurateur and TV show host, Ritu Dalmia has managed to master it all and yet she still strives to satisfy her insatiable appetite for endless gastronomic innovations.

The chef, who has received laurels for cooking scrumptious Italian meals, has never undergone any professional training. Her passion and love for food was obvious even at the tender age of nine and since then there has been no looking back.

She fell in love with Italian cuisine during her frequent visits to Italy, while supporting her family's marble business. While her heart drew her to Italy, her mind understood that the endgame was all about being a successful restaurateur.

To give her dreams shape, she opened her first restaurant – Mezzaluna – in Delhi, which was, in her words, 'a wonderful disaster'. She had to shut it down within three years of setting up shop. She then picked up the pieces and went to London where she opened a second restaurant, but her heart never left India.

In 2000, she came back and opened Diva, which became an instant hit. The rest, as they say, is history. Since then, there has been no looking back. Dalmia set about setting up one successful restaurant after another, under the banner Riga Foods, in India's capital. She is the creative flame behind some of the most successful eateries in Delhi – Diva, Latitude28, Cafe Diva, Diva Piccola and Diva Spiced – which are a rage among Indians and Expats alike.

Over the years, she has added many more feathers in her cap – a thriving catering business, a cookery show host and a cookbook author, she does it all with equal ease.

How did you come to Italian cuisine and what was the catalyst for it?

My interest in Italian food began with a school trip to Italy when I was 10 years old. I then joined my father's marble business and from the age of 16, traveled extensively in Italy – that is when I fell in love with Italian food. I don't necessarily look at my journey in milestones – just some great memories. I have enjoyed traveling and discovering things along the way. I love being in the restaurants and over the last few years, catering around the world has been a brand new adventure with lots to do.



We have six restaurants in Delhi. As different as they are, our market positioning has been using quality ingredients, ensuring consistency and personalised service. At Diva we like to treat our guests as they are visiting our home. The same filters down in all our training.



How many restaurants are you operating currently and what is their market positioning?

We have six restaurants in Delhi. As different as they are, our market positioning has been using quality ingredients, ensuring consistency and personalised service. At Diva we like to treat our guests as they are visiting our home. The same filters down in all our training.

Elaborate on the business model of your parent company Riga Foods.

Our business model is very, very simple – to keep our guests happy. If you keep guests happy with consistently good food and service – that is the first ingredient to a feasible business model. Apart from that, in India, restaurants have the burden of a very high real estate cost. So one has to think that through.

What is your strategy for engaging customers?

We don't have a strategy – that sounds almost calculating. Our philosophy has and has always been very simple – use quality ingredients, pair them with quality and personalised service and engage with the customer. The other thing that is very, very important is to listen to customers. They give you the best feedback.

Which particular cuisines do you focus on and how have you seen them evolve over the years?

My first love is Italian food. My travels have taken me to far flung places and to places not discovered before. These experiences have found a place in what we do at the restaurants and in the events I curate for catering.

Also, it's joyful to feed guests who know good food – it makes what we do more rewarding. At the cafes, for instance, I very often incorporate a recipe of a dish I have fallen in love with during one of my travels.

A recent example at Diva Italian is something I'm incorporating from a little village in Italy called Vallesaccarda at a restaurant called Antichi Oasis Sapori. I tried a Burratta Praline there and we incorporated it at Diva Italian and did our own version with Ricotta, Burratta and goat cheese.

As far as evolution goes, a lot more is available today in terms of produce and ingredients. This is a huge step forward. When I opened Diva in 2001, there used to be a scramble for cheese and olive oils.

You are a chef-cum-restropreneur? Do you see your role evolving further in the future?

When it comes to food I wear many hats. It's not always a chef's cap. There are so many different aspects to running a restaurant. Some things are more enjoyable than others but all are intrinsically important.

Cooking up a storm

The scope of catering services in India is humungous given the fact that the country celebrates numerous festivals and occasions in the form of important events. The industry is now extending its reach beyond marriages to include social gatherings, formal events, conferences, parties, sporting events, etc.

by Nivedita Jayaram Pawar



Sanjay Vazirani

Over the last decade, the catering industry in India has rapidly evolved and has become central to any large social and outdoor gathering. Functions that were earlier handled by families are now being increasingly outsourced to catering units, which often result in better arrangements and an opportunity for the family to enjoy the event. Considering the significance of social celebrations and events, the catering business is a rewarding option with a huge potential of growth.

Valued at Rs. 20,000 crore, the catering industry is one of the fastest growing sectors that has seen a surge in demand across the country. Mostly dominated by unorganized players, many of who run their business from the comfort of their homes and small establishments, the catering industry in India has maintained a 20-25 per cent growth rate year-on-year. This includes small-scale vendors along with local and national level players.

The growth in the industry can be attributed to the fact that catering services start-up costs are considerably lower and real estate doesn't have to be in a prime location. One can work out of location that is further away but yet service the entire city. A lot of caterers are empanelled with banqueting venues, which offer them commissions. Banks and joint venture partners are also recognising the potential of this business and are willing to offer an extended hand for establishing the business and also for its expansion.

According to the Federation of All India Caterers (FAIC), an industry body that has more than 3,000 members across 14 states, the catering industry in India is primarily spread across metros, tier 1 and tier 2 cities. "It has definitely come a long way from the days when we had started. There is a heightened awareness of food and various cuisines. Clients demand variety in food. And they are more particular about the authenticity of ingredients, styles of cooking

and presentation. They want the food customized with the rest of the theme of the event. Guests are more experimental these days and enjoy trying out new cuisines and are looking for more variety, range and innovation in food and presentation,” says Narendra Somani, President, FAIC.

The festivities from October to November and weddings from November to March in India are among the best times for the catering industry. Though, the industry doesn't rest for the remaining part of the year as well.

help reduce the labour cost, increase productivity and at the same time help to reduce the wastage of food products.

Key trends in the industry today

In a world of tough competition where business and brand names are at stake, many catering companies are flexing their creative muscles for innovative ways of catering business and social events. “Competition within the catering industry is stiff. Every guest is different and unique. We



New emerging segment

Although weddings account for nearly 65-70 per cent of the catering segment, corporate and sporting events are fast catching up. “The scope of catering in corporate segment is now much larger. Previously, there used to be only events like product launches, conferences and updates. Now companies are organising events such as Employee Motivation day, Family day, destination conferences, etc, which require catering. The concept of destination wedding too is catching up. We have booked a palace in Italy for an upcoming wedding in December and will be flying down people for the same,” says G.S. Bindra of Bindra Hospitality, a 25-year-old Pune-based catering and event management firm.

Advancement in cooking and transportation technology is fuelling the growth of the catering sector. Gas powered kitchens, which were long been favoured by caterers, is giving way to Induction as it is more environment friendly and energy efficient. This, together with the rise in gas prices, improved technology and awareness of the advantages of induction, explains why more catering units are making the shift.

High tech vegetable cutting and processing machines, blast freezers, Individual quick freezing, Retort technology, combi ovens, reefer vans, etc,

need to have trained and professional associates to customize every event and to pick competitive prices for services and balance the guest's budget. We need to be innovative, creative and upscale to be one of the preferred meeting venues,” says Varsha Sachdeva, Director of Catering Sales, Westin Garden City Mumbai.

The sit-down, plated dinner is not endangered, but alternatives are becoming more popular, from entire meals served on small plates, to Mongolian barbeque to dessert-only or hors d'oeuvre-only events. Guests today want to be entertained by the catering. That can be as simple as a chef who chats up the guests while serving or as complex as a menu item that foams, sizzles or bursts in some amazing way.

Here are a few catering trends that are now ruling the industry:

Customization

Clients today are way more demanding than before, believes Sanjay Vazirani who counts Ambanis, Ruia Brothers, Goenkas, Binani and the Poddars among his regular clients. “Everybody wants their event to have the best food, services, presentation, theme-based service ware, etc. Customization is the solution. The strength of a caterer lies in being able to adapt to these varied

Advancement in cooking and transportation technology is fuelling the growth of the catering sector. Gas powered kitchens, which were long been favoured by caterers, is giving way to Induction as it is more environment friendly and energy efficient.

Make every meal a
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