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Trade Journal for the Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Industry

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Culinary wizardry at India Food Forum



Innovations with ingredients and brands and lessons in menu engineering



Featured inside: M. Mahadevan, Henrik Österström, A.D. Singh, Rahul Akerkar, Anjan Chatterjee



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What can you expect at a gathering that attracts the most eclectic bunch of cognoscenti from the Food Retail industry? As is customary at the annual India Food Forum (organised by IMAGES Group and publisher of FoodService India), the Conclave this year rippled with energy and its usual share of heat and light that the conferences, workshops, exhibitions, live shows and networking sessions radiated.

Industry mavens who spoke on different themes and topics at the numerous panel discussions threw up interesting insights on the Food Retail industry. Discussions also led to information on trends, emerging product categories, understanding consumer behaviour, and on marketing and promotion strategies – all of which, as everyone agreed, are integrally knit into the performance and growth metrics of food service operators.

This issue of the magazine offers a focused round-up and conspectus of the slate of discussion and debate on various topics related to food retail at India Food Forum. For those who were not there, we bring you the interesting bytes and meaty morsels of information exchanged at the Forum. Turn to pages 64 to 65 to find out the outstanding achievers who won the Coca-Cola Golden Spoon Awards for excellence in different categories of food retail.

My congratulations to all the winners and my heartfelt thanks to the participants at the Forum for making the show a great success. I also express my gratitude to everyone in the industry for making India Food Forum a stellar platform for articulating the vision of the food retail industry in the country and for forging deeper ties and understanding with all stakeholders.



Amitabh Taneja

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M. Mahadevan

'Hot Breads' Mahadevan sees the World as his Oyster



Sixty-two-year-old M. Mahadevan is a 'change' agent in the culinary landscape of the country. His stand-alone restaurants are theme specific, artistic, hygienic and the food, unparalleled! Deliberately, he has eschewed the familiar cookie-cutter mentality of fast food chains and chosen to open multiple brands of speciality restaurants.

Starting with Rs. 60,000 in 1982, he has today 252 partners across 18 countries and has a finger in the pie of 476 eateries across the globe. At the India Food Forum last month, 'Hot Breads Mahadevan', as he is popularly known in the industry, was felicitated with the South India Retail Award for his stellar role in contributing to the foodservice business landscape of South India.

FoodService India spoke to Mahadevan to get his story of entrepreneurial grit and remarkable business odyssey.



Tell us about your entrepreneurial journey in the foodservice business and how it has progressed over the years till now.

Actually, I started my career not with the food services industry but as an Assistant Professor in the University Of Madras in 1979. As a normal day job I taught Marketing to management and accounts students. But my fierce ambition to be a part of the hotel industry drove me to satisfy this urge. I took up a part-time night job with a hotel in the city where I started working for four hours at night to learn more about the industry. At the hotel I juggled many roles – I was a trainee, a bell boy, a receptionist: everything. So, while I was a professor during day time, I also moonlighted as an apprentice with a hotel in the evening.

I left my teaching job and moved to the F&B sector full time in 1982. Along with a partner who I had met when I was working with the hotel, we started our first take out – a Chinese take-away at a restaurant in Chennai. I opened my kitchen with Rs. 60,000, and it opened at 5 p.m. and closed at 11.30 p.m. That was the time Chinese food was a craze among the people.

One day, one of my customers who was building a commercial tower asked me if I would be interested in taking up a place there. That was how my first restaurant Cascade opened. We served Chinese, Thai, Malay and Japanese cuisine. An interesting thing about the restaurant was the way i chose to do up its interiors. Through the good books of my neighbour, who was painter MF Hussain's son, I reached out to Parmeshwar Godrej and sought her services. That was in 1986.



In those days, the interiors of restaurants specialising in Chinese and Oriental food were mostly done up in red and green. I told Parmeshwar Godrej that I wanted my interiors in all white and blue and wanted it to have a very different look and feel. Eventually, it became a major selling point of my restaurant and people just loved the look.

From then on, I have not turned back and the business has multiplied ever since. Another turning point came some three years later when I launched my Hot Breads venture. The idea was born during one of my trips that I used to make to Singapore for sourcing the ingredients like Chinese sauces. The dinky looking bakeries I saw during those trips fascinated me and caught my fancy and I decided to build one back home.

In 1989, I started Hot Breads with Rs. 11 lakh. People thought I had gone crazy and many questioned my move. But I had ideas of my own. I was not looking to sell just bread and basic bakery

stuff. I had my eyes on selling more exotic fare: curry buns, pastries, pizzas, burgers, etc. Bread was only to be an inducement for piquing people's interest and make them wonder as to what novelty the bland staple could hold in my shop.

I ensured that people did not return disappointed. I created some exciting concepts. We took a bun, filled it with curry and made it a curry bun. We filled chicken tikka inside a croissant. I got the idea to make these things Indian after I saw what the Japanese did to their bakery items. People used to crowd in our unit at Alsa Mall in Chennai. Our curry buns are a big hit even in faraway Paris.

From day one, we started making profits as the concept was unique and the product tasty. It was a perfect cocktail. We broke even in the first year itself and never looked back. In the third month itself, people from Kochi and Bangalore came to me to start Hot Breads units there. Soon, I came to be known as 'Hot Breads Mahadevan'!

In 1994, I opened my first international outlet in Dubai, which became my staging post for further forays internationally. Only last month, I opened my most recent international outlet, a south Indian restaurant in Melbourne-Australia. As of today, we have a total number of 268 outlets in India and 145 units across the world under

Today, I work with 252 partners across 18 countries and there are 476 eateries that I am connected with across the globe. In India I have three companies and internationally each partnership is a separate entity.



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Food Service Opportunities and Trends

by Premjit Mohapatra

At a panel discussion at India Food Forum, food service stalwarts came together to discuss some of the burning issues faced by the industry today: the changing diners' preferences; changes in India's food service industry vis-a-vis what's happening in the rest of the world; changes in regulatory and legal environment; impact of digitalisation on food service industry; and new formats of food outlets.

India today is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It is expected to register a GDP growth of 7.5% this fiscal and is on its way to becoming a \$3.8 trillion dollar economy by 2021. The country's economic dynamics are playing out in force and the imprints are visible all over: the ever-evolving consumer demands, rapid urbanization, favourable demographics, increased disposable income, more women in workspace and changing lifestyles and food habits. All of these economic factors have ushered in a scenario where the food service industry is changing every quarter and there are ripples of disruptive changes coursing through the market. But what is heartening is the positive upside to these changes with the market outlook presenting significant opportunities for industry players.

Food Service: Key Highlights

- CAGR growth forecast of 19% for the food service sector in the organized segment for the next five years.
- The food service sector is estimated to be valued at Rs. 500,000 crore in 2021. The organised segment is set to grow from the current 30% share to 41%.
- The per capita spend of Rs. 6,500 per year on food service is significantly lower compared to China where per capita spend is seven times higher.
- All the data points to a big technological revolution in the offing. With 2% of the

foodservice market on apps, the industry already begets one million daily phone orders, 30 million online orders, 200 million active Internet users. The share of smartphone users is expected to be 39% of cell phone subscribers by 2019.

The numbers are fairly impressive and speak for themselves. And what they clearly point to is a sector with plenty of opportunities waiting to be tapped. "The food service sector has witnessed an unprecedented growth and considering the significant contribution it makes to the economy, it is expected to contribute 2.1% of the total GDP of India in 2021. The sector will bring in a lot of investments, opportunities and challenges," said **S.K. Maratha**, *President, Food Service India*.

Changing Landscape and Emerging Trends

The food service sector is blessed with a young, dynamic and diverse food-loving consumer base, which is driving up consumption with higher disposal incomes. There is an increasing preference to eat outside, brought about by hectic lifestyles and the paucity of time. A growing participation of women in the workforce and double income families with eating out or ready-to-eat means are creating new opportunities for the industry.

Brand aware consumers are forever eager to explore newer and richer culinary experiences. Food evolution is happening

L to R:
S K Maratha
Shashikant Shetty
Altamsh Patel
Sushil Sawant
Chef Juliano
Kajal Bhatia
Gaurav Singh





“ The sector has witnessed unprecedented growth and is expected to contribute 2.1% of the total GDP of India in 2021 ”

S.K. Maratha
President, Food Service India



“ Companies should evolve strategies to avail the benefits offered by advancements in technology ”

Shashikant Shetty
Ex-Honorary General Secretary, AAHAR Association



“ Indian food is very versatile and finding acceptability is a challenge and we have to take the views of the bloggers in our stride ”

Chef Juliano
Owner, Link room, Corporate Chef - La Ruche



“ If we can fix the back-end through technological interventions, then we can reduce wastages, inputs and overhead costs ”

Sushil Sawant
Director, Commercials, Vista Processed Foods



“ Ambiguity in food regulations and licensing procedures are a concern and there is a lack of regulatory standards for organic foods and a need to streamline it ”

Kajal Bhatia
Founder Nutritionist, Owner, Kajal Bhatia Health

thanks to innovations in the traditional menus. Fusion foods, with the extensive use of foreign ingredients in traditional Indian dishes, are attracting experimental consumers.

Indian food will continue to dominate and grow strong and be complemented by the rise of Indian ethnic and regional cuisines. Foreign players are adapting themselves to suit the local palate while Indian restaurants are introducing Thai, Mexican and Italian cuisines.

Health and hygiene conscious consumers with wellness on the mind are moving towards healthy eating options. Food service operators are meeting customer preferences by adding healthy food options to their menu, ranging from lactose-free, vegan, low carbohydrates, gluten-free and diabetic meals, etc. Some restaurants have also started serving health food or organic food as their core offerings.

Internet penetration and access to smartphones contribute to a new breed of consumers with an increasing demand for gourmet and specialized foods. Based on reviews shared by food bloggers, food preferences of customers are being influenced.

Technological disruptions in the market are taking place with web-based ordering, and it is set to revolutionize home delivery with the faster availability of food on order. Home delivery of food is a new trend and is addressing the convenience aspect. There are established and evolving retail formats with fine dining models, molecular gastronomy and food festivals for consumer experience. Home delivery and online ordering are together moving the needle on consumer convenience.

Food trucks, drive-through and takeaway joints are being set up for consumers on the go. Food

aggregators and food courts are consolidating all format types under one roof. Not only do they provide easy access to food when indulging in shopping and entertainment activities, but they also offer a choice of multiple cuisines.

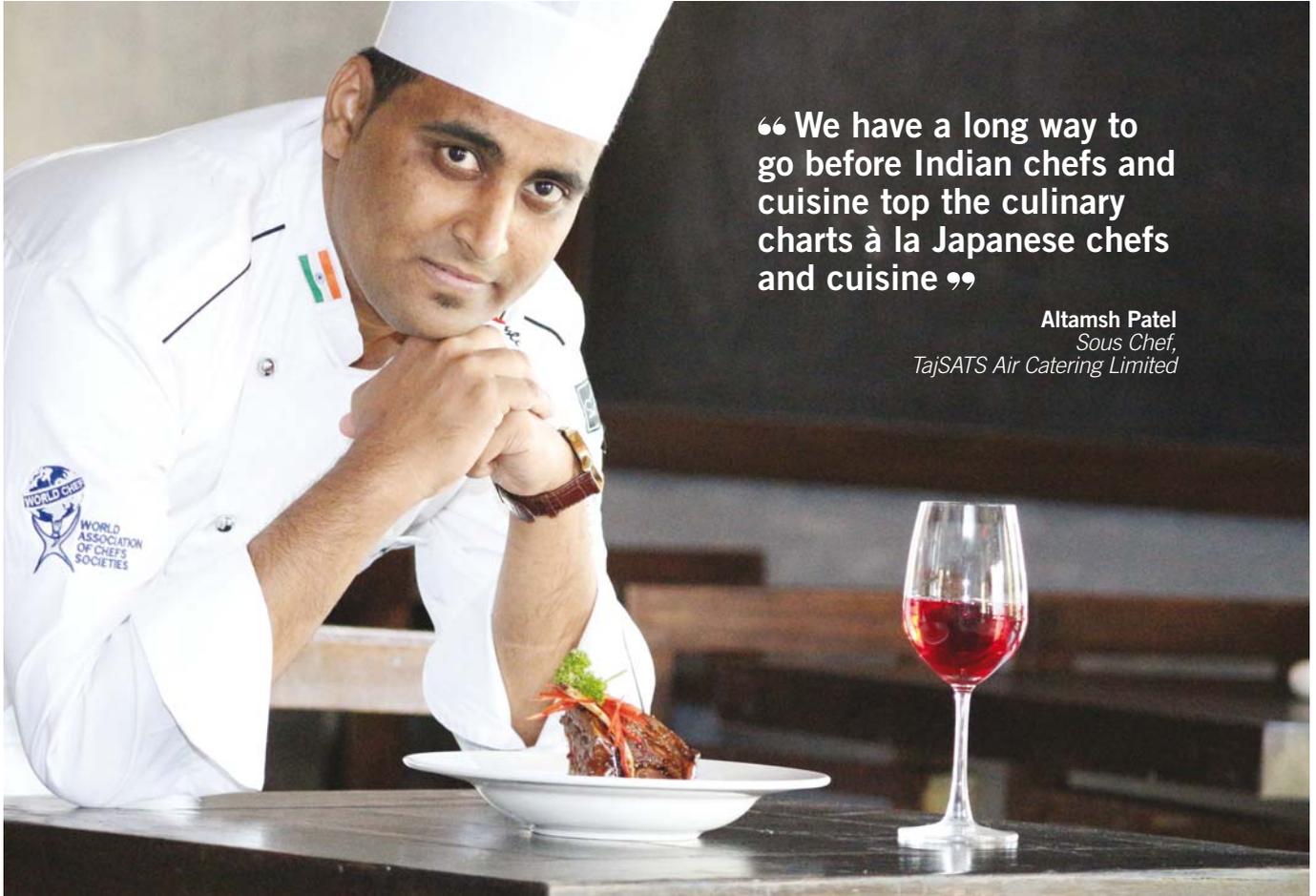
This changing landscape, in tandem with the upcoming trends and the growth trajectory that India is experiencing, is fast-tracking the growth of the food service sector. This pace of growth is expected to continue in the foreseeable future, driven primarily by the consumers and food service operators. The rapid growth brings in its wake a plethora of opportunities, both at the front end and back end of the industry, amidst challenges that need to be addressed to sustain the desired growth story.

Key Growth Challenges

Availability of skilled manpower: The industry today requires skilled manpower to meet the fast-evolving challenges. Ineffective communication skills and lack of basic service skills are expected to impact the demand if the issues are not addressed. Finding and retaining quality manpower is an issue and the industry is beset with attrition rates.

Technological disruptions: With rising digital influence on consumer decision making, companies should adopt technology in their business strategy to enhance consumer experience and improve operational efficiency. “We don’t have the manpower with requisite skill sets to handle every customer, and companies should evolve strategies to avail the benefits offered by advancements in technology,” said





“ We have a long way to go before Indian chefs and cuisine top the culinary charts à la Japanese chefs and cuisine ”

Altamsh Patel
Sous Chef,
TajSATS Air Catering Limited



Altamsh Patel, Sous Chef, TajSATS Air Catering Limited, speaks to FoodService India about the growing influence of the Japanese and the other global culinary styles on up-and-coming Indian chefs and the way to synthesise global and regional cuisines in a way that presents exciting opportunities for chefs and consumers alike.

Indian chefs are designing culinary models that sustain creativity and culinary excellence

How would you describe your culinary journey so far and what have been the turns and tides that have shaped and influenced your career?

After completing my Hotel Management at Rizvi College of Hotel management in Mumbai, I had a dream start to my career with Taj SATS Air Catering, where I currently work as Sous Chef responsible for Japanese and Continental cuisine. During the six years that I have spent with Taj SATS, I have had the opportunity to work under the guidance of legendary chef Satish Arora and a host of expatriate chefs who visit us from time to time. This wonderful exposure has shaped my career and culinary outlook immensely.

Which cuisines do you focus on and how have they evolved over the years?

Japanese & Indian are the two cuisines that I hold close to my heart and they have largely shaped my culinary philosophy. Why else would you find Wasabi by Morimoto's in Taj hotels at Delhi and Mumbai?

Japanese cuisine has taught the importance of discipline for recipes, ingredients, tools and equipment and the various cooking techniques to the world. We too have started seeing the impact of this on Indian chefs in a big way. Indian chefs have started designing culinary models that sustain and eventually enhance consistency, creativity and culinary excellence.

There has also been a recent spurt in interest in Peruvian and Nordic cuisines but so far this interest has been largely in the West. But given the fact that Indians in large numbers are now travelling all over the globe

and embracing global cuisines, we expect this trend to touch Indian shores sooner than later. However, no cuisine can take away the popularity of the new found Indian cuisine, which embraces classical regional Indian and modern Indian fusion food.

Talking of regional cuisines, how do you see their potential and which ones do you think have a great future?

The regional cuisines of India are vast and the true magnitude of these culinary delights is yet to be truly presented on the global culinary scenario. A very interesting aspect of regional cuisines is that it is further enhanced by our rich family culture wherein recipes get passed on from generation to generation through home kitchens. So the scalability and richness of this culinary heritage is staggering.

With the advent of internet and an uptick in travel, regional cuisines are finding greater reach. Chefs realise this and have started channeling this trend into culinary models in the domestic and international market alike.

Leave apart the forerunners in regional cuisine like Gujarati, South Indian, Marwari, Punjabi, Maharashtrian and Dilli ka Khana, even the cuisine of hills from various parts of India has started making a mark with unique and vintage recipes.

What is the one thing you believe will change the way food will be promoted in the future?

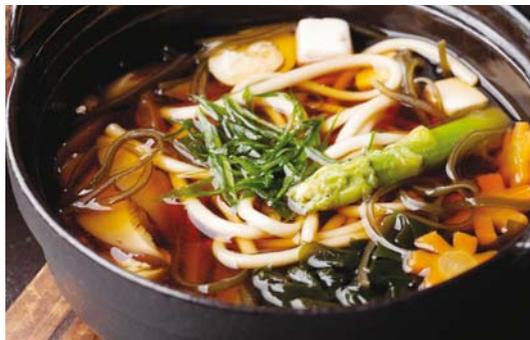
Futuristic food trends are shaping largely in tandem with the changing face of our daily lives. Technology has come in big time with an unending array of tools and equipment supporting myriad interesting ways of cooking and pre-setting food on the platter. Healthy food has become the mainstay of any cuisine and chefs' efforts are to conjure an eclectic meal experience using global ingredients.

Home cooking too has come out of shadows and has embraced modern techniques and the spectral range of tools and ingredients, which is now easily available to all. In essence, the future lies in holding on to our timeless culinary traditions and techniques and embracing global diversity to keep churning out newer culinary experiences.

Does India have enough good quality, trained and qualified chefs to meet the new emerging demands in food service industry?

There is ample amount of talent which, if given proper direction, would give us excellent chefs in the coming times. However, I must confess that we still do not share enough with others which, if done, would result in the growth of all chefs, teams and cuisine at large. To me the success of a chef lies in the skills and success of each and every team member.

With the advent of internet, there has been a significant growth in the awareness levels with regard to different cuisines. However, we have a long way to go before Indian chefs and cuisine top the culinary charts à la Japanese chefs and



Japanese & Indian are the two cuisines that I hold close to my heart and they have largely shaped my culinary philosophy. Why else would you find Wasabi by Morimoto's in Taj hotels at Delhi and Mumbai?

cuisine. It is only in recent years that we have had Indian chefs getting recognised with Michelin stars. But now, Indian chefs are beginning to establish their prowess in all regions of the World and things can only get better.

Can you offer us examples of some innovative F&B ideas that you have implemented recently or have plans to implement?

While training, growth and development of the full team is of essence at all times, at the product level we keep organising various workshops that better our Oriental, Korean and Indian offerings.

The most interesting workshop at TAJ SATS Air Catering – last year – was the plating and food presentation workshop. It helped us bring in novelty and uniqueness to our plated food and it continues to give us great results.



The men, their models, and dining landmarks

by Premjit Mohapatra

L to R:

Harmeet Bajaj
A D Singh
Rahul Akerkar
Anjan Chatterjee
Ashish Saxena

It is a rare occasion when the icons of fine dining in the country get together to talk of the culinary concepts they have introduced, and how many of them have become the defining benchmarks and touchstones for the food service industry. The panel discussion “Panache: The hallmarks of great cuisine and the icons who built them” on Day Three of India Food Forum saw a high voltage, straight-from-the gut interaction among the doyens of the foodservice industry as they shared with the audience the experiences and decisions that helped to shape their successful progression in this brutally competitive industry.



In an engaging conversation with the host **Harmeet Bajaj**, *Food connoisseur & Partner, Impresario*, acknowledged masters of the restaurant industry held forth on a range of issues and the ideas they ignited, which took on a life of their own and grew into enduring stories.

One such example of a foodservice entrepreneur who pulled himself by his bootstraps and pushed his way to success is **Rahul Akerkar**, *Chef & Restaurateur and Founder, Indigo*. With no culinary school background and experience to fall on, he took up a job even as a student to make ends meet. From overcoming a speech impediment to being promoted as a chef from a dishwasher, Akerkar is now a celebrated and much emulated restaurateur and an avid diver who has gone on to define the fine dining culture in Mumbai with his labour of love ‘Indigo’.

“When I came back to Mumbai in 1989, there wasn’t much happening on the standalone restaurant scene. I then tied up with AD Singh to set up *Just Desserts*, a standalone dessert outlet. From there I moved on to my first restaurant *Under the Over*, which was followed by *Indigo*,” said Akerkar.

AD Singh, *Owner, Olive Bar & Kitchen*, and the man who gave Akerkar his first major career break is known to have a Midas touch for creating landmark restaurants. Not only is he the creative spirit and the brain behind the swanky, high profile restaurant chain Olive Bar & Kitchen, Singh has also pioneered the distinct standalone restaurant culture in the country. A hugely successful restaurateur who doesn’t pretend to be a chef, he has given us brands like Monkey Bar, The Fatty Bao and SodaBottleOpenerWala. He is known to keep churning out restaurants and concepts that always push the envelope further.

“Most of my life journeys have happened because of the things I love. I had a perennial sweet tooth and that led me to my first Just Desserts, a standalone desserts concept. I am a guy of ideas, my journey has been about creating concepts that could work for a wider audience and that’s seen me do a variety of things across the country over 28 years,” said Singh.

Anjan Chatterjee, *Founder and Managing Director, Speciality Restaurants* (Mainland China), has established a company that runs well-known fine-dining restaurant chains ‘Mainland China’ and ‘Oh! Calcutta’. His company today runs 123 renowned restaurants that continue to churn authentic cuisines for the foodies. The company also boasts of eight award-winning cuisines to its credit. Before Chatterjee’s passion for gourmet cuisine found its expression in the restaurants he created, his first job was with Taj Hotels, which he quit to start his own advertising agency.

“I am a cook at heart and not a chef. I used to cook food for friends like CY Gopinath and Bachi Karkaria who are equally passionate about food. It was they who pitched the idea to me to market Bengali food, which wasn’t

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