

Food & Drink

Eat and drink your way
through town.

Just eat it

*The scoop on
Delhi's cuisine*

Lala Duli Chand's tasty kulfi treats. Photography **Cherian Thomas**.

Stirring the pot

Food & Drink

It's pretty hard trying to work out Delhi's culinary melange. But that doesn't mean you can't have fun trying, argues **Sonal Shah**.

Great cities are defined, at least to some degree, by great cuisines: either through an easily available and intrinsic tradition, or through making choices available that draw the culinary traveller from far and wide. Paris and Shanghai are examples of the former, London and New York perhaps of the latter. We've checked off the monuments and the Metro in our own Delhi, we're well-stocked with netas, bade baap ka betas and SUVs, but what do we have to offer in terms of a culinary narrative? In a city as old as ours, surely our food isn't only about butter

chicken, qorma and kababs?

Some of the earliest accounts of food in Delhi come from the fourteenth century traveller Ibn Battuta's writing. In her *The Essential Delhi Cookbook*, Priti Narain (who is herself from a Kayasth Mathur Delhi family) paraphrases Battuta's descriptions of Sultanate feasts. She writes that these rulers brought with them the habit of communal dining, with people seated hierarchically. Battuta also describes beginning the meal with a sharbat and ending it with paan. But then, written traces of "Sultanate food" pretty much disappear.

According to educator and activist Sohail Hashmi (see On the table), Delhi court cuisine was an amalgam of Central Asian (Turkic, Persian etc) and local techniques. As he said, "In Central Asia, most

food is cooked on spits or in ovens and in animal fat. You have very limited use of spices. The chunks of meat are large and not as soft as we cook them. When the Central Asians came, the tradition of bhun-na, using ghee as an agent, was added. These two mixed to create what we know today as Mughlai food."

While most scholars and foodies claim that what we call Mughlai is possibly more influenced by Awadhi or Nizami cuisine than what the Mughals ate, there are references to food and cooking in various Mughal documents: the *Baburnama*, the *Ain-i-Akbari* and other, less formal sources. A section of the *Baburnama* describes how Babur brought certain fruits like melons and grapes to India. (It appears the ruler missed these so much that he once became teary-eyed upon cutting open a melon.) It also talks of

the local edible flora and fauna and describes concoctions like murabba. The *Ain-i-Akbari* has a section with price lists for various food-stuffs, as well as full recipes with measurements of several dishes.

Much of the variety of these ingredients has disappeared. Hashmi told us how many saag varieties are no longer cooked, or indeed, aren't even available anymore. The *Ain-i-Akbari*'s regional specifications of goat and lamb varieties seem unimaginably exotic today. Other ingredients, which we take completely for granted, are newer additions. Narain writes that potatoes only came to North India by about 1830. Tomatoes came only about 20 years after that. Chillies were introduced to South India by the Portuguese in the 1500s, but probably took longer to reach Delhi, as they are not men-



The meat of the matter The nihari specialist *Kallu Ustad* in action



Chaat puja Kalmi and kachalu chutney complete the papdi chaat at Ashok Chaat Bhandar; Deepak Dewan's fruit cream (below)

tioned in the *Ain-i-Akbari*.

While Muslim cuisine is perhaps the best recorded, Delhi cuisine was and is made up of the traditions of several communities. Delhi's sizeable Kayasth community were scribes and officials in the imperial courts and, as such, their food habits were heavily influenced by Muslim ones. (See On the table.) There was also an inventive vegetarian tradition: Narain mentions several dishes that featured vegetables masquerading as meat. Kayasth recipes and menu plans could be found – along with Muslim ones – in Urdu cookbooks that were possibly originally put together by housewives. Indeed, Mathur found some of her recipes in these unfortunately no-longer-available treasure troves.

Banias, particularly Marwaris, and Khatris are chiefly responsible for Delhi's vegetarian traditions. The hallowed tradition of Delhi chaat may have come from the Bania community, according to

several sources. Hashmi is of the opinion that khomchawalas (gents carrying their wares in baskets on their heads) would hawk their kulfis and chaat from store to store, and the storekeepers would call them over to keep the snack train going. Or, the khomchawalas would be called home for family feasts. These street traditions continue alongside their non-vegetarian counterparts in the walled city. The newer tradition of Punjabi and frontier food and the attendant popularity of chicken and tandoori items have been added to the mix since Partition.

Uniformly, every food-lover or scholar we spoke to said that the best examples of any of Delhi's cuisines – whether from the "traditional" resident communities of the sheher or newer migrant ones – can be found in people's homes. We can't provide you with a list of people's phone numbers, obviously. But if you start in the old city, a quick course in the evolution of our city's khana is possible. We've compiled a list of some of the best, most authentic, most inventive or just most popular places to eat out in purani Dilli, as well as a list of caterers and bawarchis to start with. Happy exploring.

Meat

Al Jawahar Jawahar's new and old branches serve "Mughlai" (kababs and oily curries) in a

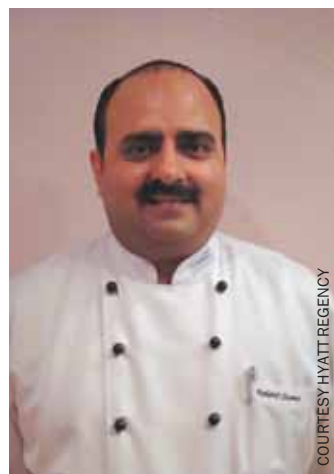
slightly more laidback fashion than Karim's. According to Hashmi, Jawahar was founded by a family of butchers; food critic Marryam Reshii holds that their cuts are better than Karim's. **65 Bazaar Matia Mahal, opposite Gate 1, Jama Masjid (2326-9241).** **Chawri Bazaar. Daily 7am-midnight. Meal for two Rs 300.** **Kallu Nihari** Beloved nihariwala

of Delhi foodies (and their patron saint, writer Rahul Verma) – but you'll have to get there early; this stuff runs out fast. Verma suggests Haji Noora ki nihari at Bara Hindu Rao for a spicier version of the dish. **Kallu Nihari 180 Chhatta Lal Mian, Jama Masjid, approach via Churiwala and ask for Tiraha Behram Khan. Daily 5-7pm.**

Chawri Bazaar. Haji Noora ki nihari 3576 Bara Hindu Rao, Thelewali Gali, Sangtarashan. Daily 6-8am, 6-9pm.

Karim's Hotel The classic, if only by virtue of reputation. While Charmaine O'Brien mentions in her book *Flavours of Delhi* that the Karim progenitor was an Arabian soldier-turned-personal cook for Babur, Hashmi told us that "Karim has very cleverly invented himself. It is in Gali Kababian – this is a family of kababchis who then said, 'shahi hain'." Whatever the true story, it won't make a jot of difference to the popularity of the famous burras. **16 Gali Kababian, Bazaar Matia Mahal, opposite Gate 1, Jama Masjid (2326-9880).** **Chawri Bazaar. Daily 7am-midnight. Meal for two Rs 300.** **Super Meat Stall** Avtar Singh's family used to sell swords in the underground market at gurudwara Sis Ganj. In 1966, Singh's grandfather and father set up Super Meat Stall, popularly known as "Super Meat Wale". Try

3 questions for...



Rakshit Sharma, chef, Aangan.

What sets Aangan's food apart from other Indian restaurants in five star hotels?

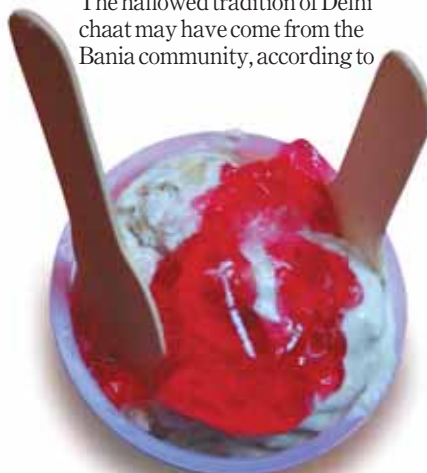
It serves traditional Delhi cuisine, which is a mix of Bania, Kayasth, Muslim and Mughal, with an emphasis on a variety of vegetarian food, including kababs and main courses.

Any particular picks?

The following dishes are a fine example of Delhi's cuisine: Aangan ki seekh (lamb mince skewered with fresh coriander, garam masala and carom seeds), very traditional and similar to kababs that sell in the streets of old Delhi; murg zafrani (chicken breast marinated in Kashmiri saffron and cooked in the tandoor); kali mirch aur ajwain ka paneer tikka (cottage cheese marinated with cream and carom seeds); and tawa aloo tikki (griddle-fried potato patties filled with lentils). **Sonal Shah** Hyatt Regency Delhi, Bhikaji Cama Place, Ring Road (2679-1234). Noon-3pm; 7-11.30pm.

Why and when did the restaurant's name change? And how did the menu change at the time?

Dilli Ka Aangan became Aangan in mid-2004. However, there was no change in the food concept and style.



their hot, spicy curries of mutton pieces or keema with phulkas, or the mutton pulao with gravy. 937 HC Sen Road, Chandni Chowk, near Fountain, next to HSBC ATM (6990-2920). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 10am-9pm.

Ustad Moinudeen Rahul Verma's pick of the kababchis. He vouched that "the seekh kabab is very soft, not rubbery like you get in most places". And it's not made of mutton. Gali Qasim Jaan, Lal Kuan, in front of Hamdard Dawakhana. ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Daily noon-8.30pm.

Vegetarian meals

Adarsh Bhojanalaya The few sit-down places to eat ghar ka khana out in the old city are Marwari-style bhojanalayas. Verma recommended Adarsh to us, despite its lack of good seating. Order the separate special

tadka along with your unlimited thali. Verma also recommends nearby Annapurna. We also like New Soni's thali of unlimited dal, aloo-tamatar and phulka and limited daily sabzi, raita and sweet. 483 Haider Quli Corner, below Andhra Bank, Chandni Chowk (2398-7576). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 10.30am-6pm; 6-11pm. **Annapurna Guest House** 680 Curch Mission Road, Fatehpuri (2396-6680). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 10.30am-3pm, 6.30-11pm. **New Soni** 5568 Nai Sarak (2393-6143). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Mon-Sat 11am-4pm, 7pm-11pm.

Chacha Di Hatti This chhole-bhaturawala staple is not strictly within the old city, but according to Verma, Kamala Nagar was where the first generation of migrants out of purani Dilli shifted to in the 1950s. Limited supply, so get there early. 32 Bungalow Road, Delhi University, behind Kirori Mal College. ☎ Vishwavidyalaya. Daily 9.30am-3pm.



Give piece a chance Shahi tukda in Bazaar Matia Mahal

Gunjan Goela



Sheher ka khana caterer.

What is your own cooking background?

Ours is one of the old families of Delhi – my great-grandfather started his watch business and our family was known as ghadiwalas in the old city. Cooking has been handed down to me from my grandmother, my mother, father and aunts. We were a joint family of 40-45 people living together. My grandmother and aunts would cook and us children would help out.

All the fine techniques are lost now... There's a Muslim technique of cutting onions to a fine shred, by hand, without changing the position of the hand; those nuances are lost. That style of cooking, with a mortar and pestle – the imam bastak, kutti, chakki... I remember when my mother would say, "today we have to grind salt." And it wouldn't be a small amount, but about 10 kilos.

How did you start catering?

I was sitting with a few friends about 20 years ago and someone said, "our Punjabi khana is so good", and someone else said "our Gujarati khana is so good". I felt, what about our Dilli ka khana? What the hell is it? Later, I spoke to Rajeev Talwar, who was managing Dilli Haat at that time, and we did a festival to showcase puraani Dilli ka khana. It went on for three days and 26,000 people attended. I took it forward from that.

How different would a wedding you're catering for today be from such an occasion 100 years ago?

If I was to create the same menu, the food actually remains almost

the same. It's the experience that matters. I would have to recreate the pots and pans, the ambience, the style of serving... Weddings even 40 years ago had limited menus but huge quantities. The nai would go stand on the street corner and call out the invitees. Guests could bring family and friends – the event was for the whole mohalla. It was a community experience. Today it is not. It is eating for yourself. Whether the person next to you has a full plate or not doesn't matter.

What's your favourite place to eat in Delhi-6? How about in New Delhi?

In puraani Dilli, my favourite place for bedmi-aloo and nagori-halwa is Shyam Sweets in Barshabulla near Nai Sarak. I also love matra and kulcha in Hauz Qazi. For chaat and sweets, it's only old Delhi. Kamala Nagar is also good for chaat. New Delhi is good for snacky things: chhole bhature in Bengali Market; cold coffee in D'Paul's; Embassy does an excellent chicken steak; Wenger's is unbeatable for cakes. China Kitchen at the Hyatt is ideal. For Indian, you get a good meal at Fire at The Park.

Name a definitive Delhi dish.

One mitthai that's almost disappeared is ghiya ka lachha. Only one guy in old Delhi that I know makes it for me, occasionally and with a lot of drama. And, of course, dault ki chaat, which has nothing chaat-like about it. There is something similar in Lucknow [malai makhan] and Hyderabad [nimmish], but only in Delhi is it called that. Halwa-nagori is another one – people eat halwa everywhere but only here with nagori. **Sonal Shah**

To contact Gunjan Goela for catering call 98113-49055 or 92120-35323. See page 40 for more catering options.

Bengali Sweets House 27-37 Bengali Market (2331-9224). ☎ Barakhamba Road. Daily 7am-11pm.

China Kitchen Hyatt Regency, Bhikaji Cama Place, Ring Road (6677-1334). Daily noon-3pm, 7-11.30pm.

D'Paul's 22 Janpath Bhawan, Janpath (2332-8214). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 9.30am-7.30pm.

Embassy D-11 Connaught Place (4151-7556). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 10am-11pm.

Fire The Park Hotel, 15 Parliament Street, opposite Jantar Mantar (2374-3000). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 12.30-3pm, 7.30pm-12.30am.

Shyam Sweets See listing under "Makhan Lal Tikka Ram" on page 38.

Wenger's A-16 CP, Inner Circle (2332-4373). ☎ Rajiv Chowk. Daily 10.30am-7.45pm.

Kake Di Hatti This nondescript but famous eatery was started about 63 years ago by owner Gurdeep Singh's great-grandfather. Kake's lunch thali is minimal but memorable, the rotis simply enormous, the dal makhani legendary, and the 11 kinds of stuffed paratha less greasy than the ones in Parathewali Gali. 654 Church Mission Road, Fatehpuri (98109-09754). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 7.30am-12.30pm.

Makhan Lal Tikka Ram This one is the place to try a Delhi breakfast favourite: bedmi-aloo. Almost before you enter the old city from the north, in the midst of the auto parts market opposite St James Church, is a little shop whose board reads "Makhan Lal Tika Ram - mltr", but which has for years been known as Mitthan Ki Bedmi (despite the fact that the gentleman at the counter insists that Mitthan's sweet shop closed down circa 1975 and all that remains of it is Mitthan Motors three shops down). Strictly speaking, it's a sweetshop, but it has a tiny balcony into which you can cram yourself (along with about seven other people) and eat fantastic bedmis (Rs 7 a plate). Served with a mixed aloo-chole ki sabzi and khatte aam ki launji, two of these are a meal. Try their matthri and nagori-halwa as well. If you're in the Chawri Bazaar area, try Ram Swarup's or Shyam Sweets for more of the same. If you're closer to Chandni Chowk, head to Shiv Mishtan Bhandar – an institution as much for its bedmi as for its political celebrity client list. 1259-60 Bara Bazaar, Kashmere Gate (3255-9415). ☎ Kashmere Gate. Daily 5.30am-10.30pm. **Ram Swarup** 3284 Bazaar Sita Ram (2395-5569). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Daily 6am-10pm. **Shyam Sweets** 114 Chowk Barshabulla, Chawri



CHERIAN THOMAS (2)

On the money Monu Singh offers daulat ki chaat

Bazaar (2326-8087). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Daily 6.30am-10pm. **Shiv Mishtan Bhandar** 375 Kucha Ghosi Ram, Chandni Chowk (2392-1406). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 6am-10pm.

Nirmal Restaurant Try this alternative to the famous fried breads at Pandit Babu Ram Devi Dayal and its ilk in Parathewali Gali. "Asha Ram ke parathe" (named for the original owner three generations ago) are richly stuffed and include some of the best paneer parathas (Rs 16) around. Even better, there are three large rooms to eat in – with a view across the Town Hall chowk. 756 Chandni Chowk, opposite Town Hall. ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 6.30am-midnight. **Pandit Babu Ram Devi Dayal Parathewali**

Gali, Chandni Chowk (98116-02460). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 9am-midnight.

Snacks and chaat

Ashok Chaat Bhandar This award-winning chaatwala (as opposed to the other Ashok across the road) has kalmi vada and kachalu chutney to make the chaat pop with flavour. **Ashok Chaat Bhandar** 3611 Hauz Qazi Chowk, entrance of Bazaar Sita Ram (2382-7740). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Daily 11am-9pm.

Natraj Café Known locally as "bank ki pakodi", the dahi bhallas (Rs 20) served here are well-known beyond the walled city as well. The dahi is the winning factor: it's perfectly balanced between sweet and tangy. They do aloo tikkis in desi ghee as well and have a full menu and upstairs seating every day but Sunday. 1396 Chandni Chowk, next to Central Bank of India (6576-4631, 98111-67400). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 10am-7pm.

Padam Chaat Bhandar

Caterer Gunjan Goela's favorite golgappas, served, as she put it, "with nakhra".

Usually stationed nearby, just outside Naugharana, is another golguppa cart with colourful palak and chukandar golguppas.

Outside Baraf Wali Gali, Kinari Bazaar. ☎ Chandni Chowk. Mon-Sat noon-8pm.

Sultan Kullewala Kulle is a true Delhi snack invented about 50 years ago. Today, Sultan's grandson Sanjay sells the chaat in a busy gali. The chaat itself is a basket of peeled potato, filled with anardana, boiled channa and fine strips of ginger, and the whole sprinkled with a number of homemade masalas. Be warned though, when Sanjay asks you how spicy you like your kulle, say medium, unless you're readying for a blast. **Cheera Khana, Roshan Pura, Nai Sarak** (2328-2848). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Mon-Sat 1-6pm. Rs 20 for eight.

Sweets

Afreen & Zayed Sweets One of a couple of shahi tukda walas around the Jama Masjid/Matia Mahal area. Delhi's most unholy triumvirate: bread, cream and a swimming pool of ghee. **Near Hussain Chicken Corner, Jama Masjid** (93502-17460). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Daily noon-midnight.

Daulat Ki Chaat No, not chaat, and it isn't sold by a man named Daulat, but this soft whipped milk topped with kesar-flavoured whipped milk, ground brown sugar, pista and varq is the Chandni Chowk foodie's holy grail. *Monu Singh and his*



Breakfast special Bedmi-aloo

khomcha can be found Mon-Sat 9am-7pm at Dariba Kalan; Sun 9am-7pm at the intersection of Parathewali Gali and Kinari Bazaar (98731-32271/98738-41912). Rs 10 per plate.

Deepak Dewan Fruit Cream

This sweet little red cart can be found floating around Dariba and Kinari Bazaar. Within it is the most delicious thing: pieces of banana, pineapple and apple sunk in soft cream. *Daily noon-8pm. Rs 10 per cup.*

Giani Di Hatti Started in 1951 by Lyallpur immigrant Giani Gurcharan Singh, this rabri falooda joint soon expanded to shakes, moong dal halwa and ice cream. Pretty soon it expanded to other parts of the city as well. *Church Mission Road, Fatehpuri (2393-6174). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 11am-midnight. Also caters.*

Hazari Lal Jain Stop by here for all your khurchan, malai roll and malai laddoo needs. *2225 Kinari Bazaar, Chandni Chowk (2325-3992). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Mon-Sat 7am-midnight.*

Lala Duli Chand Naresh Gupta

Across the street from better-known and older Kuremal's kulfi dukaan. According to the attendant at Duli's, these two shops (and a few others in the area) supply much of Delhi with kulfi. Duli supplies to the Ashok Hotel, the Taj, Bengali Market and Sagar and is 40 years old, he told us. There are 76 items on their menu card – not bad for a room with a freezer and a couple of plastic chairs. Don't miss their fantastic stuffed kulfis (apple, orange, mango, kiwi and more). *934 Kucha Pati Ram, Bazaar Sita Ram (2323-5926, 98102-02990).*



Baap ki dal Giani Gurcharan Singh's descendant, dishing out moong dal halwa at Giani Di Hatti

☎ *Chawri Bazaar. Daily noon-8pm. Kuremal Mohanlal Kulfiwale 1165-66 Kucha Pati Ram, Bazaar Sita Ram (2323-2430, 98105-40105). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Mon-Sat noon-8pm.*

Old Famous Jalebiwala The name speaks for itself at this century-old counter. They also have samosas, but it's the rope-like jalebis (even bigger jalebas available on request) that steal the show. *1795 Chandni Chowk, corner of Dariba (2325-6973, 98110-20546). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 8am-10pm.*

Halwais Shahjahanabad boasts of several historical sweet shops – from well-known Ghanthewala

(established in 1790) on Chandni Chowk itself to Shireen Bhawan tucked away in Chitli Qabar. In between are Annapurna Bhandar (the second Bengali sweets shop in sheher, established after Kamala Sweets closed in 1940), Chaina Ram in Fatehpuri, Kanwarji's (from 1830, known for its dalbiji) and others. Traditional Delhi sweets that are commonly available are pista or kaju lauj, habshi halwa (brown, burnt-milk halwa), gond halwa and laddoo, sohan halwa and ghee ghewar (in the winter). **Ghanthewala** 1862 Chandni Chowk (2328-0490). ☎ *Chandni Chowk. Daily 8am-9pm. Shireen Bhawan 1466 Chitli Qabar, Jama Masjid (98187-93124). ☎ Chawri Bazaar. Daily 8am-9pm. Annapurna Bhandar 1463 Chandni Chowk (2396-2050, 2386-8466). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Mon-Sat 8am-8.30pm, Sun 8am-noon. Chaina Ram Sindhi Halwai 6499-6470 Fatehpuri Chowk, Fatehpuri (2395-0747). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 7am-8.30pm. Kanwarji's 1972-73 Chandni Chowk, corner of Parathewali Gali (2326-1318). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Daily 9am-9pm.*

we've listed above will cater events (just call and ask), there are a number of bawarchis and caterers who cook for parties. You'll have to go once to discuss your requirements – you'll be given a shopping list and you'll have to come back to pick up your food. We've been assured the effort is worth it.

Babu Khan South Delhi's old standby for biryani, supposed to be descended from Shahjahan's bawarchis. Good in a pinch. *Matka Pir, next to Pragati Maidan (2337-1454). ☎ Pragati Maidan. Daily 8am-8pm.*

Gunjan Goela Daughter of an old Delhi family, Goela caters sheher ka khana for weddings and parties. She can also arrange khomchawallas for chaat and desserts from the old city. See interview on page 36. *Call (98113-49055, 92120-35323).*

Hakim Makes excellent qorma and comes recommended by both Goela and Verma. *Rodgran, Lal Kuan. Head past the Hamdard Dawakhana, reach a corner with a man selling gajak, turn left and ask. ☎ Chawri Bazaar.*

Idris Sohail Hashmi recommended Idris' qorma and biryani to us. *Churiwalan, opposite Metro Guest House, 639 Churiwalan, near Jama Masjid. ☎ Chawri Bazaar.*

SM Zaki Based in Civil Lines. Recommended by Goela. Qorma, biryani and nihari for under ten people. *Call (98991-06206).*



Dona delights Nagori-halwa

Catering and cooking

Besides the fact that several of the chaatwalas and halwais that