

# BHARAT DARSHAN

India's largest continuing study of  
socio-cultural changes. An annual  
insight mining project by  
futurebrands consulting

Bharat Darshan unearths the fundamental socio-cultural changes in India. It helps us with sharper strategic thinking on brands.

BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
TECHNOLOGY

BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
WOMEN

BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
YOUTH

BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
MEN

↓ MEN IN INDIA - PDF

BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
HOMES

↓ HOMES IN INDIA - PDF

BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
FASHION

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DARSHAN  
MONEY

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DARSHAN  
BAZAR

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BHARAT  
DARSHAN  
PEOPLE

## BHARAT DARSHAN FOOD

A Futurebrands Consulting publication

### EXPERIENCE BHARAT DARSHAN

STRATEGIC PROJECT FOR BUSINESSES

Bharat Darshan is a strategic project for businesses. It discovers unique socio-cultural patterns examining consumers and culture; and creates large opportunities for brands in emerging India. The project provokes newer ways to think and creates compelling solutions for business challenges.

Companies commission Bharat Darshan to:

- Find new growth levers
- New product and revenue ideas
- Shift marketing paradigms
- Develop consumer vision for their future plans
- Create micro-market insights, product and marketing plans
- Build brand roadmaps



**T**his compilation has been inspired by the experience of our travels across India, undertaken with the ambition of understanding the culture that shapes consumption and the meaning systems that inform brands. Bharat Darshan is Futurebrands' initiative to understand change in India. Every year, the entire office travels across India to spontaneously capture different aspects of the culture. Bharat Darshan is in its third year and over 60 cities & towns have been covered and there have been more than a thousand interactions and hundreds of hours of conversation with people from all walks of life. We have seen and understood people and their lives, because they have shared it with us. Their trust, openness and generous hospitality has made it possible for us to explore their lives and examine what different changes on the landscape really mean. 'In India' is an attempt to share a glimpse of the intriguing observations, patterns and questions that we encountered which made us wonder about the complex set of meaning systems that govern categories and consumers here.

At Futurebrands we believe that culture is the single biggest tutor to understand people and consumption. An understanding of cultural codes and a more pulled out way of framing categories can equip business heads and marketers to develop tools for their brands which are unique and meaningful to create long term equity of their brands in India. Many fortune 500 brands invest in cultural studies continuously to keep alive the ability to think radically about their businesses. This perspective examines consumers and categories in a fundamental way. It may not lead to neatly tied up 'insights' but cultural understanding allows for new principles, new language and new thinking to happen in organizations, leading to dramatic new ways to think about business and brands.

futurebrands

# food in india

THE WAY  
WE EAT

futurebrands



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# FOOD in india

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Santosh Desai who conceived Bharat Darshan as an annual event where everybody in Futurebrands travels across India to understand the cultural codes and how they are changing. Bharat Darshan has been in existence for three years and the team has gathered thousands of images, four hundred hours or more of conversations and some valuable nuggets of wisdom. The data was painstakingly analysed by the teams and patiently supervised by Santosh in an annual workshop, usually at a picturesque location in the hills which helped us to bring out the real insights. So a big thanks to everybody at Futurebrands for all the hard work.

The 'In India' series was conceived and edited by Sraboni Bhaduri. Project consultant. Mayank Mansingh Kaul help was invaluable in refining and coming up with this unique format. Simrat and Avantika of Ferris wheel design walked the final mile with us and their grasp of the content coupled with great design sense has given shape to this series.



**M**uch has been written about the language of food in India and how it is used to communicate the meaning contained in almost every aspect of our lives and societal structure. Different foods signify the meaning of rites of passage, festivals, worship as well as social structure.

What we eat is central to who we are and what our cultural identity is. The persistence of food habits of the Indian Diaspora or the domestic immigrant will confirm that. However the the way we eat, how it is served and the typical vessels used; is more responsive to changes. This interface contains the contemporary narrative of how we are changing. What stays constant and characterises the typical Indian approach to eating, storing and serving food points to the essential ethos.

What characterises the structure of our restaurants, street food places and how food is served and eaten? How is it presented and how do we engage with it? What does it say about what is essential for us in this interface and what is dispensable? How is modernization dealing with the traditional codes? What are some of the additions and deletions in our repertoire of vessels? How have some of the traditional devices for serving and storing evolved? And what does it say about how we are changing in India?



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Design: ferris wheel design

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# THEATER OF COOKING



In the food places, except for the preparation, the final bit of cooking is usually done in the open. The drama of the smoke rising, potatoes sizzling is further accentuated by dramatically large and typical utensils that signify that particular dish. The handi in case of the Biryani, the large smoking tawa of the tikki wala or the jalebi taking shape as you watch: all add to strong food associations. The more dramatic parts of the cooking are brought to the front to serve as a spectacle. The naan being thrown up in the air, the tea descending into the cup from as much height and flourish that the chaiwala can manage. All this is as much a part of the food experience as the food itself.



The participants in this theater, namely the vessel and the cook involved, are not required to be dressed up for the occasion. They are usually basic and sometimes just plain grimy. The spectacle that they create, both visual and olfactory, is the draw. Traditionally India has perhaps always been about the live counter. Halwais, who are traditionally the oldest player in out of home food, played to this instinct. The show and the crowds announce and entice like no other. ■■





There is a need to see the dish being assembled, roasted or tossed in front of you. This answers to two major needs from food; it should be hot and it should be fresh. Issues of food outside home are fraught with suspicion around purity. Hence food being cooked in front of you is very reassuring. ■■



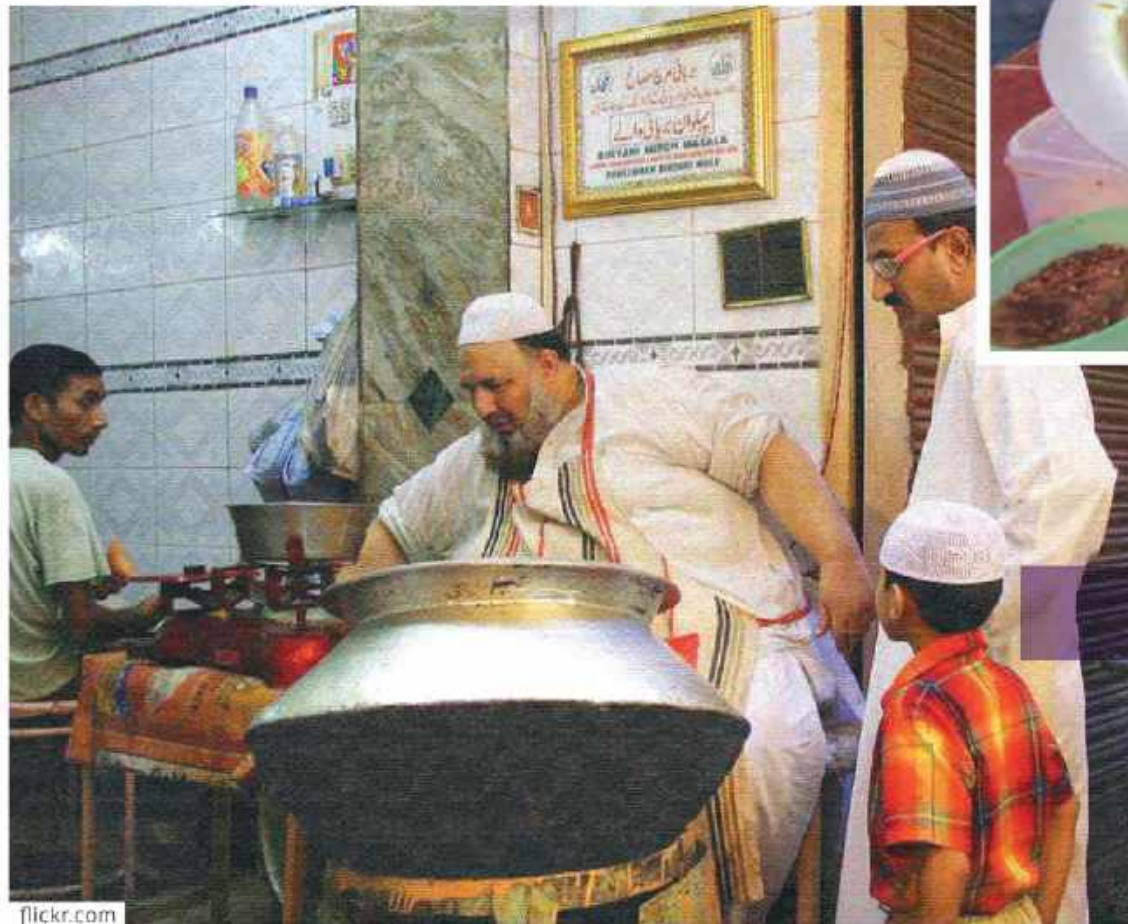






## Large dramatic vessels

The big handi of the biryani shop or the huge wok of the samosa lends the trademark identity. It is the major signifier and triggers off all the food associations. ■■





What is a chaiwala without his kettle? He has no finesse if he does not pour it from a height on a scale that is spectacular. ■■



## OPEN KITCHEN

The open kitchen is not a culturally alien idea. Traditionally we have always eaten in the kitchen. Eating hot chappatis right off the fire is something that is still integral to meals at home



<http://www.shantanughosh.com/2011/08/la-piazza-at-delhi-hyatt.html>





## AMBIENCE IS ONLY INCIDENTAL

➡ The paraphernalia around food is hardly the talking point. Furniture, ambience, lighting, etiquette of serving, crockery is still a sensibility that is being cultivated by a select few. Traditionally our requirement has been very basic—plate, a glass to drink from, maybe a bowl or two and a very basic mat or wooden bench to sit on. It is the food itself that is important, and the accompanying hospitality that counts.



All you need to sit down for a meal is a plate and glass. Specialized crockery, cutlery or furniture does not need to mediate the experience. ■■



[www.hufingtonpost.com](http://www.hufingtonpost.com)



2013/07/29

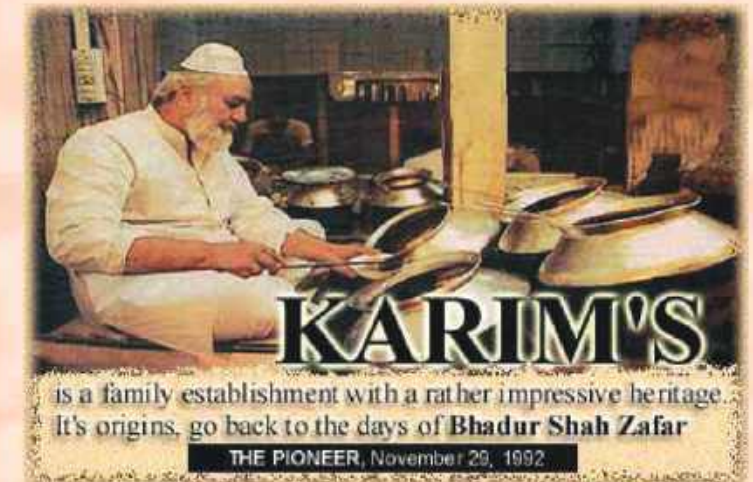


Sitting on the floor and eating is now restricted to the home space in the interiors. In the public space, modernization has brought in the dining table even though its avatar is basic. The most popular is the plastic table and chair. ■■



## BRAND TALK

Some of the best known places to eat are fairly unimpressive to look at. There is very little thought devoted to décor, furniture or crockery. Karim's may have upgraded to a table and chair and even a plastic table cover but the food continues to be served in very basic white plates with the curry dripping down the sides.



[www.karimhoteldelhi.com](http://www.karimhoteldelhi.com)



## PLASTIC TABLE COVERS AND SUNMICA TABLE TOPS

It is almost mandatory for dining tables to have plastic covers or sunmica surfaces. They can be easily wiped when curry is spilt and children do not have to be bound by strict neatness codes on the table. It liberates from the need to mind table manners and allows single minded focus on enjoying the food. Plastic table covers also speak to the desire to preserve. Never mind if a beautiful table top is never seen, as long as its pristine condition is preserved.



## BRAND TALK

The Nilkamal table and chair has tapped into the Indian interpretation of what is required of a dining table. The chairs should be light, so that additional members joining the table can easily be accommodated. The dining table needs to be easy to clean, so that spillage can be wiped off. The requirement is functional not aesthetic or ambience creating. The ubiquitous plastic dining table covers at home answer the same needs.





# FROM PAPER PLATES TO SILVER THALIS



The repertoire of food presentation is limited. It is limited to sprinkling garnishing which mostly turns out to be coriander, dry fruits and extends as far as fried onions. So, how do we signify special occasion or accord significance to a special guest? The food may be made richer with ghee or dry fruits but it essentially remains the same. **What varies with the context is what it is served in.** There is a whole range of materials ranging from the functional paper plates, to steel and melamine for everyday use to glassware for guests and going all the way up to silver thalis for special ceremonies and rituals. **The utensil pays homage. The food is the hero who does not have to try too hard.**



*In our travels across India, we were often served food like this on steel thalis where the charpoy doubled up as the dining table. The hospitality lay in the warmth and generosity of the three course meal and the many accompaniments of pickle and salad.*



## The steel thali

This is the mainstay of every household. It is hard wearing and functional. Separate bowls can be accommodated in the modification which has compartments which streamline the functionality even more. The steel thali is an essential symbol of every middle class household because it embodies the essential values of being hard working and uncomplaining. ■■





## The grander version of the thali

Restaurants have interpreted the thali in a copper and steel combination to elevate it from the everyday and homely steel avatar. ■■



*The bronze thali and bowls belongs to the traditionally more affluent households. It immediately signaled the status of the family as also the significance of the person who was being served in it*



## AXIS OF MODERNIZATION

### Disposable plates interpreted: from leaves to paper and plastic

Plates made out of leaves and bowls and cups made out of clay are the traditional ware which cater to occasions where masses and large numbers are dealt with; typically during religious festivals and temples where food is served. Some of the indigenous disposable ideas are both clever and eco friendly. Contemporary interpretations in paper and plastic are mass produced and unimaginative, which reflect none of the clever use of local material or exploiting every bit of the produce at hand.





### Self contained view of serving

**T**he bhutta seller wraps the roasted bhutta in the bhutta leaves and the green coconut seller uses a part of the coconut itself and turns it into a spoon to scoop out the 'malai' inside the coconut. ■■



### Newspaper and other recyclable paper

**M**aking paper cones, bags or just serving on a piece of newspaper, has been a popular material for making disposable containers. ■■



**F**oil has captured the imagination. It is bright and shiny. Besides being a leak proof container it also serves to transform unsightly things or just to give a sense of freshening up, when something is being re used. ■■







## ‘MORE’ IS THE CODE FOR GOOD HOSPITALITY

The table must overflow with food. It should be piled high and the number of dishes count. Main courses are surrounded by a number of accompaniments like pickle, fresh salads, chutneys and crisps. These multiply the taste and multiply the sense of plenty. Detailing the food with little thoughtful accompaniments increases the permutations and combinations available for a customized and perfect mouthful.



### More on the Table

The generous number of accompaniments meant to multiply the intricacies of the taste. It is the number of flavours, number of dishes, richness of the food being served that count. The experienced value often comes from the accompaniments and these are also what can potentially lend a unique and distinguishing character. Often an establishment is known by its special chutney or chilli pickle that it serves. ■■







## ■ THE FOOD COURT: THE APPEAL OF MORE

Food courts rather than restaurants are more democratic and inclusive. The ambience of the mall diffuses into the food court though it does not elevate it to an experience. The key to a food court is the abundance of the number of food and cuisines on offer.

The 'experience' is perhaps in the food curiosity that it enables. Being able to partake of new cuisines and calibrating it as per the risk appetite strikes a wonderful balance. Combo meals and samplers besides having the appeal of a good deal also allows more number of dishes on the table. Does the meaning structure of the food court draw inspiration from the thali?







### MULTI CUISINE RESTAURANTS: IMPLICIT ABUNDANCE

Specialty restaurants with 'authentic' flavours are for the fussy elite who no longer have a hearty engagement with food. Abundance on the menu is important. There must be plenty to choose from and every individual across age groups and preference must be accommodated. Also there must not be any pressure to reach a collective decision in favour of one cuisine or the other. Going out to eat is a food adventure. The curious overtake the purists here, and a creative combination of cuisines can happen on one plate.

The popularity of Multi cuisine restaurants is not about closing but about opening up to the million things out there which one wants to explore. 'More' dishes, more flavours and something for everyone. It is the perfect structure that pays respect to individual choices and the desire to experience 'more.'



TUPA SHANTI		ITEM	PRICE
दुध सोलहीक ड्रिंक	12.00	दुध सोलहीक ड्रिंक	12.00
दुध सोलहीक ड्रिंक	14.00	दुध सोलहीक ड्रिंक	14.00
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Multiple choice in special shops:  
Even a simple thing like a  
soda or beverage shop has to have  
an exhaustive list of choices on  
offer. A bare menu seems very  
discouraging to the visitor





**Frugality amidst abundance:  
unique Indian measures**

Creating a sense of abundance around food gives a sense of well being. However, abundance is not about having enough to waste. Wasting food is a gesture of extreme disrespect for those who are serving the food and most importantly to food itself which is divine in its origin.

Frugality especially while eating out is also about smart ordering. It is an astute figuring out of what can be made to go a long way. ■■



<http://i.bp.blogspot.com>

*Half plate: For most things it is possible to order half portions. It is a way to curtail consumption to stay within your means and not waste food if there are fewer people. One size is not expected to fit all.*

7:30 A.M. TO 3:30 P.M.		Full	Half
स्पेशल पनीर वाले छोले भठूरे	60/-	35/-	
चावल छोले व पालक पनीर	70/-	40/-	
पूरी छोले	60/-	35/-	
राजमा चावल	70/-	40/-	
पालक पनीर	70/-		
राजमा	70/-		
छोले एबि प्लेट	40/-		

<http://www.zomato.com>

<http://www.zomato.com>



**CUTTING CHAI & ONE BY TWO  
SOUP OR TWO BY THREE**

Dividing what would otherwise be a single serving, especially in the case of tea, allows for a larger number of occasions for a group of friends or colleagues to gather over a cup. And in the case of soup, it makes it possible to have different kinds of soup on the table. Cutting up a serving into two or three means many more people eating together for much less.



# INHERENT MESSINESS



Dripping, spilling and liquids flowing into each other is a common feature. There is little need to restrain food into its natural boundaries. The thali and specifically the katori is unable to contain, though its purpose seems to be exactly that. All the katori is able to do is to hand over the discretion to the eater to customise the mingling of curries and chutnies.

Eating with your hands, mixing the curry, chutnies and crafting the customized perfect mouthful is the most important thing. The messiness of the plate and dripping curry is not really a concern.









## Food without boundaries

**T**raditionally, the relationship with food has been very tactile. Curries, chutnies and something to mix it together are very important. Tossing together something with various sauces is a format that is very easy to relate to.

Food essentially has no boundaries in its structure. The ingredients in a dish meld together and flavours flow into each other. Unlike cuisines from the west, where the natural flavour of the individual ingredients are encouraged to come through; in India all the individual ingredients submerge their identity. Therefore it is only logical that tactile boundaries between the hand and food need not exist. ■■





## AXIS OF MODERNIZATION

### Spoon and napkin phenomenon

Cutlery is a culturally alien idea. But the spoon now has proliferated down to every strata and across almost every occasion. From the dhaba to the temple prasad, the spoon has a ubiquitous presence now. And it is accompanied by the paper napkin, even at the humblest street side eatery. Eating with your hands and getting your hands messy is increasingly becoming socially inappropriate.

This signals a fundamental shift in our relationship with food. There is a certain distancing between the self and the food that we imbibe. To add to that, there is the dining table or atleast some rudimentary form of it. Sitting on the ground and eating, is beginning to disappear from homes as well. How we ate was similar across socio economic classes. It was a basic requirement which united people across classes. Now our tactile engagement is being mediated by social norms. Civility is being redefined.



*The act of eating is beginning to be not imbibing nourishment but about signaling class and refinement. The spoon and the napkin is the step that places you a notch higher on the ladder.*



# WHEN FOOD IS MADE BEAUTIFUL

With the expanding repertoire of cuisines, the unadorned nature of a served dish in a thali and its attendant messiness is not the only visual code that we see. Increasingly in our food courts we see food where the visual appeal has been worked on. Traditionally, the bakery has always been a place where colorfully bedecked cakes and pastries were put in the display. This is not the only place where food articles were showcased. The vegetable market, the masala in the haats, the namkeen wala and the halwai: all made an effort to display their wares. What is the logic that binds them? Why were the codes different?





# AESTHETIC OF THE SACRED



Food in India is sacred. Vegetables, masala and especially grain are all treated with respect. By arranging it beautifully, man pays homage to food, which he receives because he is blessed. Produce from the earth is venerated. Orderliness and symmetry is our way of paying respect to what is sacred. The symmetric arrangement of vegetables, grains and masalas is a tribute to the respect that is accorded to it. Once food is cooked and ready to be eaten, the idea of 'good presentation' to attract the eater is fairly alien. It is a precious gift which has to be received gratefully.









## The Indian Kitchen

The orderliness of the kitchen comes as a surprise after the general disorderliness of the rest of the house. Here things are arranged symmetrically. Containers, utensils, cups for tea are in matching sets. This sensibility is unique to the kitchen. And this space is sacred and pure enough for the gods to reside. ■■



## THE AUSPICIOUS PAAN

Paan or betel leaf is an auspicious item and the paan shop embodies the aesthetic of the sacred. The containers are all in matching sets and the key ingredients chuna and katha are in well polished kalash. Even if the same shop sells candies and cigarettes, the paan counter remains shiny and orderly.





# DIVINE CODE OF THE MITHAI



Sweets though cooked follow the same code due to its auspicious function.

Sweets are an integral part of the pooja ki thali and all celebrations. It is a food which has divine origins. The way mithai is kept and arranged in geometric patterns is reminiscent of the rangoli which is designed to bring in good energies. The language of decoration is restrained and respectful.



*The decoration on the mithai is minimalistic but of high value material. Thin sheets of silver and dry fruits constitute most of the decoration*



## Order, symmetry and simplicity of adornment

The basic forms of ladoos, barfis remain the main stay. Display of mithai and its forms are orderly, symmetrical and there are attempts to give it decorative form. Decoration in mithai is creeping in, but is fairly minimal as compared to confectionary. The divine origins and the auspicious functions of the mithai underline its celebratory or festive use. Geometric shapes and arrangements are the key decorative elements. Order & symmetry is as far as the ode to its serious function will go. ■ ■



*Frivolity and super fluuous decorative elements are still fairly marginal.*



## Display of abundance

Fruits and mithai displayed in symmetric piles, in a bazaar that is generally chaotic, stand out. Abundance is central to what is sacred. Milk, ghee, fruits and mithai are sacred and great care is taken in their display. ■■





# PSYCHEDELIC COLORS OF FOOD



Restraint and sobriety is the preserve of food that is rich with meaning and auspiciousness. In a country that is full of color, chaos and energy much like the melee of the fair ground, the aesthetic of fun has to be full of bright vibrant colors. Foods that are led by taste or are just had for fun have the exuberant quality of a child. The surround of the food has the most degrees of freedom. Packaging and the shops themselves are always open to reinventing themselves in various eye catching avatars. The traditional fare itself maybe restrained in appearance but the carts, signage and packaging sport a festive air.



## Kulfi carts and juice stalls

Kulfi carts and juice stalls are markedly colorful entities. The carts and stalls are colorful with fairly rustic decoration. The dramatically stacked fruits and the juice stall art of film stars in bold colors and strokes light up the landscape. The kulfi and the juice itself however remain fairly unadorned. The surround is what is painted and embellished.

The product itself has been fairly insulated. The restraint is perhaps due to the divine origins of fruit and milk. ■■



*The kulfi itself has retained its original simplicity. It still comes out of a fairly dowdy metal mould. There has been no attempt to add bells and whistles to decorate the kulfi itself. Food with divine origins are secure in the way they look*





Abundance in the display of fruits in the juice stalls adds wondrous scale and color. The stalls are attractive but the glass of juice that is handed out is just juice, in all its unadorned glory.

While the juice stalls themselves are bright and colorful, the glass of juice itself is severe in its grim simplicity. ■■



*An offering coming out of fruit in its purest form does not need embellishment. Its worth and attractiveness is implicit.*





## AXIS OF MODERNIZATION

### Food surround

Packaging and retail design: While the food stuff itself may have strong codes in terms of form or taste, but whatever surrounds the food has many more degrees of freedom. Packaging is an axis of modernization that is available to even the most traditional, rule bound category.

It can be used to signify hygiene, superior aesthetics or simply to up the glamour quotient to bring a traditional category into a modern space.



*The doughnut may become a motichoor laddoo, but laddoo must remain just that. It is a one way street*



## BRAND TALK

Of mithai & chocolates: Chocolates have moved into traditional mithai territory relating to celebrations and desserts. It is not part of the traditional meaning system and therefore has many more degrees of freedom; though it might not be able to appropriate 'auspicious', gifting and change of palate has been taken into its circle of influence.





## BRAND TALK

Mithai, which has deep cultural significance has modernized along the axis of packaging and retail. Brands like Haldiram have demonstrated how modernization at the interface of consumption can take place while keeping the ethos intact.





## Disposable plastic: signifiers of a modern concern called hygiene

Visible & symbolic consumption of plastic glasses, caps, gloves & transparent packaging:

Enclosing something in the most rudimentary packaging immediately makes it hygienic – a concern that is both modern and urban. It teleports it immediately into a world where there is enough to make room for fussiness. Disposable plastic is a symbol that says modern. The pursuit here is not hygiene. ■■







## TOY FOOD

Cakes and sundaes are outside the traditional code. These are meant for play and they borrow from the aesthetics of toys. The colors, decorative elements and the embellishments speak to the motivations of play. The forms simulate or reference real life objects. Sugar flowers, cartoon characters drawn on cakes and paper umbrellas on drinks and colors that remind us of elements from fairy tales or far away lands engage the child within. It is not really food. It is not about nourishing the body but feasting the eyes, indulging the tongue and feeding the imagination.



Cakes, pastries and sundaes are novelties, which we don't quite understand. This means that imagination has a free run. We can fill in colors, details and embellishments in the way that we imagine it. It is free of any binding code or sensibility. It is the product of our imagination and we are prolific in our creations. Tutti fruiti, "gadbad" are creations which can safely be termed made in India. They are free form creations made from ice cream, shakes, candied peels, canned and fresh fruit with plenty of room for interpretation and creative excess. ■■



*Food color is not a concern when food is pure entertainment. It is a break from serious goodness. It is meant to be outrageous*





In the world of toy food, there is playfulness which is free spirited. This is food that has the license to be irreverent. As India changes to factor in the individual and its quirkiness, ice cream sundaes and cakes offer the perfect canvas for expression that has recently been liberated. It is joyous, excessive and child like in its enthusiasm. ■■





Shakes, ice cream sodas and toppings are our interface with the western world. Literacy of the different kind of spoons and glasses it requires is eagerly incorporated into the repertoire. ■■





## The colors of street food

Food eaten outside the house has little legitimacy and even less divinity associated with it. It is an uncommendable surrender to what attracts the eye and seduces the tongue. Guilty indulgence come in bright colors, befitting the crime. ■■



*Tandoori chicken wouldn't be the same if it wasn't bright red. Even today in many households chicken is not cooked at home. Bright orange colors of the chicken tikka is in line with the transgression from vegetarianism that is committed outside the home.*



## Gola

This is the traditional and indigenous version of the ice lolly. Its origin in ice, which itself is culturally considered a frivolous novelty, gives it the liberty of dressing itself in as many colors as one can imagine. It belongs to the street side vendor and therefore carries the burden of being potentially harmful to health. Mistrust comes with the territory of indulgence in frivolous food; that which has no roots in the home. It has been the endeavour of every mother to find a safe middle ground by giving it the legitimacy of 'home made.' ■■





# PLATING UP



There is no equivalent word for ‘plating up.’ Food is ‘served’, not plated up. Even when it is served to guests, the food is simply laid out on a plate or a bowl. There is little concern for how the food can be arranged aesthetically. The focus is on what is being served. Is it the best that can be offered and is there plenty of it.

The requirement is simple. Food requires a container and that’s all. The only addition is the tray. It has perhaps been adopted because it contributes to the functionality. Food served in homes is about the food itself and steel is the favoured material. Crockery and cutlery in most homes exists but it is a foreign tongue which is awkwardly spoken and rarely used. It mostly ends up in the showcase.



## The implicit language of steel, glass and disposable plastic

**Steel** is the language of homeliness. It is reserved for family members and guests who are our own. It invites you to share whatever there is with a degree of warmth and honesty.

**Glass** is the language of 'formality'. It is reserved for those who are special and where there is a need to present a starched exterior. It maintains a distance; of respect or awe.

**Disposable plastic** belongs mainly to relationships that are transient or transactional. It belongs to out of home eating where there is a desire to avoid any relationship or familiarity. ■■





## Food presentation

Aesthetics is a marker of class. It allows for a display of the number of influences and worlds that one has been exposed to. Sparing a thought for 'plating up' itself is about being conversant with the western world. Being able to reimagine familiar food in a new way and from a different vantage point is a testimony to the engagement with another paradigm.

It is about consuming the old in a new way. ■■



[www.hungryaphrodite.com](http://www.hungryaphrodite.com)





## Auto exotica

Dipping into the past and digging out grandeur, glamour or just quaintness which constitute theme restaurants and weddings, speaks of a vantage point so far removed that the self has become the other.

Showcasing Indian exotica would have earlier been reserved for the foreign tourist, but now there is a domestic market for it. Consuming what would have been our indigenous roots; in an avatar that is glamorised and uber traditional perhaps allows us to reconcile the relief with which we greet our urbanization and globalization. ■■





# WATER

How we drink water has undergone a huge change. It is now moving from being provided by a collective to being procured by the individual. On the streets and public areas it was the pyao which provides water to every passerby. For the smaller collective it was the matka. There are many values and beliefs associated with serving water. Basic belief is that nobody should be denied water, even if it is a stranger. The collective provides it free. Individuals procuring it of course have to pay for it. Individuals procure it because of modern concerns such as hygiene or where the collective has stopped providing it. Water has journeyed from public pyaoos to bottled water and from dexterous drinking to becoming increasingly helpless without a glass. The jhoota principle is still very much intact.



*Water provided by the collective:*

*The pyao at a public place which says which community sponsored it and a word of advice on not wasting it.*



## Shared sources of drinking water

The earthen matka or the modern water dispenser is shared by the family or a group, which adheres to the etiquette of not making it jhoota. Therefore one glass suffices. ■■





Cupping your hands to drink from a community source is another mode of drinking acquired at a young age. Drinking water from a community source means that there should not be any contact which will defile it and render it unfit for other people. ■■





The long handled ladle placed on top of an earthen ware pot of water, indicates that it is a shared source. Therefore care must be taken not to pollute it.

Earthen ware has begun to give way to plastic avatars, which implies that refrigerated cold water is filled in them. Water cooled in earthenware is not good enough anymore. ■■



www.indiamart.com




When water is bought it becomes a beverage. An individual glass comes with it as a part of the service. A beverage dispenser has to include value added offerings like bunta and nimboo pani. ■■



*Individual pouches or bottles of water say that the society has moved from being community supported to now leaving individuals to fend for themselves. Of course the up side is that the individual can now determine how chilled he likes his water.*





**F**ood for us is a high engagement, visceral and tactile experience. We have a voyeuristic interest in being tempted by the sight of it cooking. Of course that means that the food travels the shortest distance from pot to plate. It is fresh, it is hot and it is from a known source.

Our involvement with food obliterates the surround. Food is naturally the hero. It needs no embellishment or accessories. The involvement is primal and the organic messiness is seen as but natural. The produce of the earth is sacred and is honoured by order, symmetry and precious simplicity.

In the face of modernization, new axes have emerged. There are categories which are new and not code driven and can therefore encroach on adjacent traditional categories. However these categories which are traditional are holding their ground; secure in the knowledge that they will never need to cede ground. They are bound by code which is deeply entrenched and the relationship runs too deep.

Modernity has given rise to global concerns about low contact, hygiene and purity. The response is symbolic though visually our food scene is now replete with symbols of hygiene mostly made of plastic. Plastic enclosed is an assurance which does not need closer inspection. The price of this assurance is that we are losing our indigenous eco friendly options which maximize our resources.

The way we eat has become a marker of class in a society that has lost its markers to mobility. Aesthetics, knowledge of new categories of food and drink and the finesse of table manners is the new social language to watch out for.