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Real discussions The Deccani spread at Shahnoor's house, Aparna Pallvi discussing mahua, Lakshmi frying *bajjis* in the stove named after her, Garima Arora enjoying Irani chai from Niloufer cafe at Urban Adda ■ PRABALIKA M BORAH

Best food forward

Garima Arora and her team of Food Forward India are out touring Telangana to explore its indigenous food identity



■ PRABALIKA M BORAH

When Mumbai-born Garima Arora, the first Indian female chef – awarded a Michelin star for her restaurant Gaa in Bangkok, voted Asia's Best Female Chef by Asia's 50 Best in 2019 – landed in Telangana with her Food Forward India team, they knew exactly what they wanted.

Taste food. Visit places. Learn about food and all that for sure. However, instead of going star hotel hopping and following a traveller's guide to eat in Telangana, they went deep into rural Telangana, hunting for toddy, looking for dishes that tribal people prepare, sampled Deccan home cooked meals and sipped Irani chai with a several rounds of Osmania biscuits, puffs and what not. The team wasn't here to simply take notes on recipes. In fact none of them did. Nor were they interested in packing ingredients or wanting to know what can be used as a substitute to toddy in the toddy chicken. "If toddy chicken needs toddy, there can be no other way of cooking it. There is no need to substitute it. This journey into the heartland of Telangana where toddy tappers opened their homes to us was an overwhelming experience. It is steeped in a culture and tradition which many of us don't know. For me regional and traditional food is more than what is served to eat. It is a way of life that has been going on for generations," said Garima.

In line with her vision, Food Forward India (FFI) will rediscover the narrative around the food of India at home and bring it to the attention of international gastronomy and change stereotypical views.

Why Telangana? The idea was to capture the food identity of Telanga-

na, the youngest state. In the process, FFI wants to uncover Telangana's gastronomic uniqueness.

The focus of FFI is to start a dialogue of foods and ingredients that have been shunned either because it is not presentable in a five-star set up or because we don't want to discuss it. Garima strongly believes that no food should be laughed at. Her Michelin star chef status notwithstanding, she is like a student of food, such is the rapt attention with which she listens to details, putting each of the hosts feel at ease.

Apart from sampling toddy at a village near Medak and learning the traditional art of serving it, the team also visited the unit of Sai Bhaskar Reddy



whose research work and achievements include designing 50 good stoves. "Visiting the Chenchu tribals and getting a taste of their food was something I experienced for the first time. It made me emotional to hear their stories of food. There is so much knowledge and care in what they prepare and consume, yet we look outwards to learn about healthy food," adds Garima.

Towards the end of FFI's research trip, there was a session of Urban Adda, complete with presentations and discussions exploring Telangana on

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tribal, rural and urban levels around some key ingredients, in a storytelling and inclusive dialogue format.

Among the speakers Aparna Pallavi who spoke about her research on Mahua followed by a quick recipe demonstration. Then Sai Bhaskar Reddy shared his stove journey which followed eating fresh bajjis by Lakshmi made on a stove modelled on his innovation. As Lakshmi was the first person who agreed to use the stove designed by Sai Bhaskar, he named the stove model after her. Then there was a talk about millets by 'Millet Sisters' of Deccan Development Society. Babu Rao of Niloufer Cafe shared his journey over cups and cups of irani chai.

Another speaker spoke about introducing traditional eating habits to the present generation to preserve the habits.



Much to do about handlooms

This week, we pay homage to weavers, from runways to workshops

Nowadays, it is a no-brainer to find a beautiful sari that has a rich backstory; one needs to only either dig through their mother or grandmother's almirahs for that timeless weave or head to the nearest handloom meet in the city. Here are some handloom calendar events worth your time:

LFW's take

Sustainable Fashion Day, on day 2 at Lakmé Fashion Week, will observe Rina Singh's Eka and Telangana State Handloom Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd. (TSCO) join forces to showcase at sustainable fashion day with the initiative #GlobalisingTelanganaHandlooms.

"Our main motto with this collaboration is to enable skill development at the grass root level that would in turn create employment opportunities for the artisans," explains Jayesh Ranjan, Principal Secretary of the Industries & Commerce and IT Departments of the Telangana government.

This winter collection uses blockprint textiles, wool and wool-silk plaids and stripes, the designer gives a glamorous touch to the feminine collection by adding velvets and hand painted embroideries. The new collection 'Jo, the rebellious one' takes inspiration from the novel *The Little Women*, inspired from Jo's character and her transformation from being a young opinionated tomboyish girl to a fine woman.

Rina Singh is indeed excited, explaining, "Telangana is a special region, the textiles are so dexterous and one of a kind in terms of skill level involved. I think more and more work should be done in the region to bring the textiles to the attention of the world."

For the environment

At Saptaparni, gocoop will be hosting an exhibition and sale called 'The good loom mela' which represents a thoughtful approach to fashion and the arts and crafts of India. Essentially, the good loom is a movement that helps promote a socially conscious lifestyle caring towards the environment and artisans who make the products.

This will be taking place at Saptaparni till February 15.

How-to

Daram will be teaching novices and enthusiasts of the textile world all about the energies around block-printing and tie-and-dyeing. Suitable for children and adults, this workshop costs ₹400. One workshop is on February 15 from 4 pm till 7.30 pm, while the February 16 workshop runs from 11 am till 2.30 pm.

☎040-27765503 to register.

Stories of the soil

Sayam Bharath Yadav goes nostalgic while raising global concerns in his solo show

■ NEERAJA MURTHY

"Where Are We Going With The World" screams a banner at State Art Gallery in Kavuri Hills. If the title stirs you, wait till you see the works created by artist Sayam Bharath Yadav on display inside. His solo show of 50 works comprises paintings, installations and drawings; The artist gets nostalgic while discussing global concerns. It is been worth the effort as he has been planning it for more than two-and-half-years.

Bharath, who belongs to a cowherd community has always been known for painting bulls, buffaloes and cows on canvases. Though his family no longer carries on the traditional profession, Bharath still reminisces the good 'ol' days through his works. One of the installations 'rataalu' – of alu-

minium cans takes viewers on a nostalgic path. Painted with a tinge of earthy brown, these cans in different sizes are accompanied with measuring cups *potti* (fodder) and a cash box. "I used to see people from my family driving scooters to deliver *pau ser* or *ardha ser* milk. Now, we have the plastic milk packets and I miss natural touch," he says.

Remember the vintage wooden cart in villages that were for agriculture or to ferry material and even people? That finds a replica here. At 8x4 feet, a cart created by Bharath has a transparent box filled with fibre-made horns, a reminder of the animal world destruction caused by men.

Bharath's thoughts are beautifully captured in his expressions. There's one with three friends, which artist calls a homage to a Hyderabad way of life "We can see such friends' groups – relaxed as they casually inquire, 'Kya miyan, kaise ho?'"

Bharath's drawings showcase different moods and characters from everyday life. The artist blends human forms with an animal head/instinct. "That is me" he says, pointing to a figure relaxing on a sofa with a Picasso painting in the background and an aluminium can. "I create an environment with my surroundings. I am also attached to the form and translate it on canvas. I keep painting till I get the composition. It is a constant



struggle to create."

From ropes used to restrain cows and buffaloes and arcalets to *gajjalu* (anklets) worn around their feet, it's all on display. It's Bharath's prized collection. "My brother-in-law had these things but now since their lifestyle has

changed, they are of no use. So whenever they discard them, I bring it away." A painting titled 'Bursting Bride', shows a buffalo all decked up and an installation with words 'Mir, Gir and Gujar' (breeds of buffaloes) created on an acrylic sheet are inspired by

the Narsingi cattle market. He says, "Various buffalo breeds from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Punjab are considered healthy and are decorated for prospective buyers. They make the market looks so lively."

Paintings also depict social concerns on themes like urbanisation, global warming and pollution. Two paintings focus on helmets to present a slice of modern life. Inspired by busy traffic junction, one shows riders wearing helmets jostling for space. Another work shows the irony – 'we wear helmets to protect our heads but do not show the same enthusiasm to protect nature.'

(An exhibition of paintings, installations and drawings by Sayam Bharath Yadav is on till February 17 at State Art Gallery.)



Making a point A wooden cart with fibre-made horns; artist Sayam Bharath Yadav and works on display at the gallery ■ BY ARRANGEMENT