



brainchild of
Garima Arora, the
internationally acclaimed
chef for her restaurant
Gaa and the first and
only Indian woman to
hold a Michelin-star,
**hit the road for first
time this year** to change
the narrative
on Indian food

RECAPTURING: FOOD FORWARD INDIA CHAPTER II - TELANGANA

RURAL ESCAPE AND URBAN ADDA
4TH-8TH OF FEBRUARY 2020

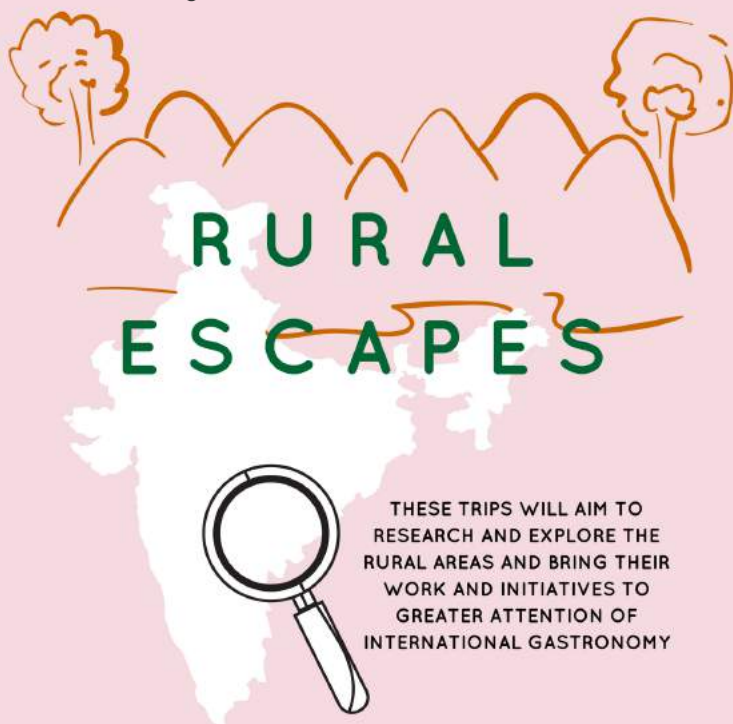
"The birth of a knowledge movement."

- Anoothi Vishal, writer.

FOOD FORWARD INDIA CAME TO TELANGANA

From February 4TH to 8th, Chef Garima Arora and her team at **Food Forward India (FFI)**, led by **Matylda Grzelak the General Project Manager**, travelled through tribal, rural and urban food spaces in Telangana, to document and discuss food culture of India's newest state. The team chose Telangana to be the first stop in their mission to explore food across India. Firstly, for its complex culinary past from the Satavahana Dynasty, and Deccan Sultanates to the Mughal conquest and the Nizam's Rule. But since Telangana is a newly formed state they were **curious to understand what could define its unique culinary identity and differentiate it from that of Andhra?** Hyderabad city was most affected by historical influences, while the rest of the region features many distinct Telugu cuisine characteristics. Unique knowledge on indigenous biodiversity is still found today among the numerous Adivasis settled around the state. Each of these brought to the land their concepts of foods and cooking techniques, recipes, crafts and art that characterize the food in the region.

FFI is a nomadic initiative travelling across different states of India, set up by **Garima Arora** to rediscover the narrative on Indian food,



The main idea for the first Chapter was to keep all the conversations very inclusive and therefore we wanted it to take character of a collaborative gathering rather than a symposium format. This time first, following two months of research, we literally hit the road to explore on ground the elements that make up the mysterious identity of Telangana food scape, to then bring it all to our second collaborative gathering in Hyderabad.

says Arora.

The team first set off for a **Rural Escape** – a study trip centered on food, aiming to map areas of a food cultural significance around the state and bring that to the greater attention of international gastronomy.

DAY 1

PEDDAMADUR



The first stop on Rural Escape Telangana was the Peddamaduru village in Devarupula Mandal, Warangal District. One of the communities there is the Goud Community known for their toddy tapping and obtaining products such as neera and kallu.



Toddy or palm wine locally known as 'kallu' is an alcoholic beverage made from fermenting the sap of palm trees. A non-fermented beverage available only in the early morning is neera, being the palm sap. In the community, both men and women alike consume toddy after a hard day on the fields. Toddy is traditionally served from a specially crafted pot and is drunk from a boat-like cup made from palm leaves.

Used for cooking in this community, Sampath—the youth leader in the village—prepared natu kodi chicken dish cooked in the toddy vessel with the fermented sap. Meanwhile, ladies of Peddamaduru demonstrated Bonalu, a traditional festival in celebration of the Mother Goddess, singing and dancing with a pot on their heads filled with cooked rice and jaggery, decorated with neem leaves, turmeric and kurkum. In the village, Dr Sai Bhaskar Reddy Nakka, showcased his “good stove” museum he set up there, explaining how his work of designing low-cost, efficient stoves helped rural women cook safer, with less smoke indoors.



DAY
CTD. ↑



The second half of the day the team spent in Medchal, Rajabolaram in Sujatha Gardens with Rupam and Sashi Kumar on their 11-acre man-made incredible fruit forest. Once a land with around 40 mango trees, today is bursting with biodiversity of 2500 different trees.



Particularly interesting are their borewell management techniques and approach to natural farming. Though they are not experienced farmers, Rupam and Sashi believe in learning through trial and error, demonstrating that one does not have to be a generation farmer to cultivate own vegetables, fruits and plants to share it with others.

Most important to them is reconnecting children to nature and educating them on the origins of food, biodiversity and labor involved in its production.

*(right: Rupam Kumar;
phot. Matylda Grzelak)*



SUJATHA GARDENS

DAY 2

(right: Godigaripally village, Sangareddy District & ornamented bullock carts
phot: Matylda Grzelak)

Team visited the Deccan development society in Zaheerabad region, in Sangareddy district, celebrating the 20th year of their mobile biodiversity festival – Paata Pantala Panduga – in Godigaripally village. The traveling festival started on January 14th, 2020 and is scheduled to visit 28 villages. It is known for being the longest cultural campaign in India's voluntary sector; a carnival of the farming women wherein they decorate a number of bullock carts set in a caravan, with hundreds of local seeds (mainly millets) and other farming motives (drawings).



ZAHEERABAD REGION



(left: Garima Arora and Mogulamma – power member of the Millet Sisters Network, who travelled last year to New York to receive the UNESCO Equator prize for environmental conservation; phot. Matylda Grzelak)

Among the farmers, majority of which belonged to The Millet Sisters Network—a network of women farmer members promoting, conserving and consuming millets, the festival was meant to disseminate the study of their rich tradition of irrigation-free and chemical-free farming and give them a platform to discuss and address these issues. Under the colorful, festival tent, Garima Arora has been invited to stage to participate in the discussion sharing with the other participants, Mr PV Satheesh, director of the DDS and local officials about FFI's mission to capture and promote local food.

DAY 3 MALLAPUR HAMLET

FFI visited a Mallapur Penta (hamlet) in Nallamala Forest Tiger Reserve. Visiting the Chenchus—a forest tribe, who abide by their traditions to stick with their conservative hunting and foraging practices. Unfortunately with government and NGO interventions they are modernizing and adapting to new food culture. On that day FFI learnt of their old and new ways of life and food culture. Some of this included learning about the use of bottle gourds for water vessels, their wild honey harvest fundamentals, some of their cooking techniques, the antibacterial properties of eating tamarind and siruman tree ash, dying role of mahua in their food culture and finally, tasting some foraged vistara beans.



raw, slightly roasted foraged
vistara seeds



ash from dried out siruman tree
& fresh tamarind - helps combat bacteria

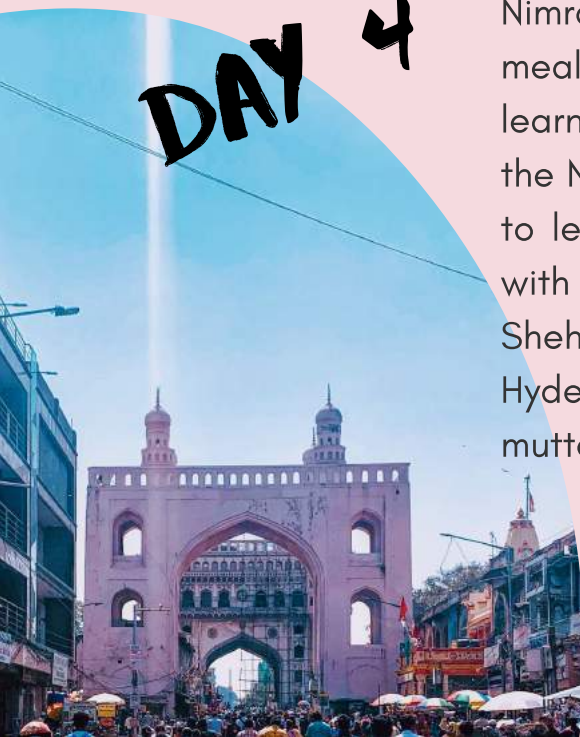


roasted vistara seeds
from dried up fruit

The team ate their way through Hyderabad. Starting with breakfast at restaurant Nayaab, walking through the old city, seeing the making of munshi naan (hyderabadi specialty, tandoor baked square maida flour naan) and vark (pounded silver leaves made from pure metals, used for ornamenting sweets).

Followed by a break for chai and Osmania biscuits at Cafe Nimrah. They also visited the Barkas community, shared a meal including delicacies like biryani and haleem and learnt of cultures and traditions being passed down since the Nizams. They made a stop at the Imperial Sweet House to learn the art of Badam ki Jali and Ashrafi. Day ended with a beautiful dinner at KHASSA cooked by home cook Shehnoor Jehan, which presented her century-old ancestral Hyderabad recipes including shikampur, tamate ka kut, mutton kadu dalcha and dum ka murgh.

DAY 4



HYDERABAD

FEBRUARY, 8 URBAN ADDA

At FFI, every exploration ends with a city event called **Urban Adda**. This city "meeting" is a Rural Escape finale that is an informal, open and inclusive dialogue, discussing traditions, techniques, "innovations" while tasting experimentative and lesser-known Indian foods in a unique living room style setting.

The **Urban Adda Hyderabad** was hosted at **The Culinary Lounge**. The evening's event kicked off with **Garima Arora** giving the audience a recap of FFI's explorations over the past few days. *"I find throughout the world that Indian food is extremely misunderstood and under-appreciated and it is time we take responsibility to change that".*, said Aurora. Next **Gopi Byluppala**, welcomed everyone in his venue and gave a brief introduction to the food scene of Telangana. In the following parts the organizers were asking the audience to move to other areas where next presentations would take place, which gave the event a new dynamic.



Aparna Pallavi, walked us through the significance of **Mahua** in tribal areas. Her speech was accompanied by a cooking demo, where she demonstrated a stuffed puri-like dish with dried mahua blossoms called Kudmul. She also spoke of foods like mahua being seen as shameful and our role in changing the narrative and removing that stigma.



Dr Sai Bhaskar Reddy Nakka has spent his life researching and designing 50 '**Good Stoves.**' He spoke about his work helping women in rural communities cook safer, about the cultural stories behind traditional stoves, and how the flame and fire adds perspective to food and flavor. To show how a traditional stove works, he asked the FFI team to bring to the event the **ladies of Peddamaduru**, who fried hot *mirchi bhajjis* (battered green chilies) with the traditional peanut and tamarind paste filling on his stove.

During the break there was steaming chai and Osmania biscuits from **Niloufer Café**. **Babu Rao**, owner of Niloufer shared with us his story of building the Niloufer empire to what it is today.





The conversation moved back inside to our living room for a chat between **Elizabeth Yorke (FFI Assistant Manager)** and **Ananth Narayanan**, who heads the Relationship & Social Impact initiative of **Dialogue in the Dark** - India; part of the famous international experience in 41 countries where guests can experience everyday life activities and dine in complete darkness, guided and served by visually impaired waiters. Ananth provoked the audience to think about how food is a medium for social inclusion.

The last part of the agenda was a **panel discussion with Chef Garima, Chef Amey Marathe, Vice President of Telangana Chef Association (TCA), CEO & founder of JSAMEY BIOTECH**, who is building an eco-organic waste solution producing gas from food waste for restaurants and hotels, **Dr Dayakar Rao, Principal Scientist at the Indian Institute of Millets** and **Sankalp Vishnu, editor of the Times Food & Nightlife Guide**. The Panel was in conversation with the audience around **Innovations on Traditions and the Preservation of Culinary Heritage**. During the panel, guests were given a tasting of three dishes from Restaurant GAA including the legendary corn dish and two dishes off the new menu: guava leather with sev puri and hot tandai with milk skin dipped in chocolate.

The last meal of the day belonged to **Jyothi Valaboju**, a home cook and author, publisher and expert on Telangana cuisine who served a delicious Telangana meal that included *masala vankaya* (eggplant curry), *brain curry*, *palapakoora pappu* and *pacchi pulusu*. The last toasts were made with **freshly brewed millet beer** from Telangana.



Photos from FFI's trip to Telangana:
available [HERE](#)

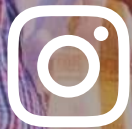
Please credit: **Matylda Grzelak**

For more information on FFI contact:

Matylda Grzelak, FFI GM
matylda@foodforward.in

Food Forward India
will be back to
explore another state
in India soon!
Stay Tuned.

FIND US ON SOCIAL MEDIA



WWW.FOODFORWARD.IN

[#FOODFORWARDINDIA](https://twitter.com/FOODFORWARDINDIA)