



# FORTUNE COOKIE

SOURISH BHATTACHARYYA



**W**HEN Havell Dharampura emerged out of a decrepit building dating back to 1887 — if not earlier — in one of Chandni Chowk's quieter *galleys* across the road from the Jama Masjid police station, it was the culmination of a 10-year restoration effort led by Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Vijay Goel and his son Siddham, who has just graduated out of the Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad.

When the 11-room heritage hotel opened early last year, it was hailed as a showpiece, an inspiration to owners of other Chandni Chowk *havelis*, million-dollar listed-in-Goel's book *India: The Emperor's City* (Roli Books, 2003), to prevent their buildings from just withering away or falling into the hands of cookie-cutter builders.

Missing from the *main media response* to Havell Dharampura was the fact that it is also the newest jewel on the culinary crown of Chandni Chowk. An old haunt of gastronomes that got a new lease of life thanks to the Metro, Chandni Chowk is famous for its legacy of edible offerings, from Nalini's *dahi bhalla* to Chaita Jain's *Kanchari kaawa* and Gauri's *chula bhajra*. What it doesn't have is a modern restaurant encompassing the culinary traditions of the heritage neighbourhood that pulls together a bouquet of influences — Muslim, Kayasth, Jain and Bangla. The address you get is the cross-cultural mash-up of Haldipur's son Dewan Brothers.

The gap has been plugged by Lakhori, the restaurant at Havell Dharampura named after the red-tiled bricks traditionally used to build Chandni Chowk's stately homes. Even on a summer day a visit to Lakhori is a pleasure — the smile from the Jama Masjid police station doesn't fade more than 100 metres; the by-lanes are surprisingly clean, thanks apparently to Goel's close watch on the neighbourhood, and you still come across *chishti* *havelis* although much of the area



Havell Dharampura is an example — unfortunately the only one — of the potential of Chandni Chowk to grow into a heritage culinary destination beyond the Gali Paranthe Wali-Fatehpuri-Jama Masjid triangle. The pictures are of the Havell's restaurant, Lakhori (above) and dishes like 'Paneer Ki Tokdi' (above-left) 'Lehsuni Tikki' (below).

# Heritage with a culinary twist

which is dominated by *havelis* has been overrun by soulless buildings.

As you enter Havell Dharampura past the reception desk it's a corner from where the pillars of the family in the past kept a watch on people and goods coming into the domain, you walk into a courtyard with a busy fountain at the centre

**P**OPULAR in the months when Delhi is less scorching the courtyard leads you into the restaurant, which looks straight out of a period film, with ornate tiled walls, black and white pictures of Chandni Chowk in its heyday, and one floor and arches, even one with Lord Ganesh at the centre flanked by two angels inspired by *El Greco*. But I was imagining how dining at Lakhori must

be like when there's a live *Saahib* performance in the five-hour window of howl that must be breaking bread on the rooftop with views of Jama Masjid's minarets all one and not the gleam of the golden domes of Gurudwara *Sri Gauri* on the other.

The food, like the restaurant's décor, combines the classic with the contemporary — and surprisingly, the menu has been put together by the Havell's guardian angel, Vidyan Goel, who like her father is an SRCC alumna and has an MBA in Finance, and also runs a national toy bank for underprivileged children, and her mother, Preeti, a professor of nutrition at the School of Correspondence, University of Delhi. Both being vegetarians, they opted in Vidyan's husband, an investment banker, to sample the non-vegetarian side of the menu over food trials that lasted for three months. So the food you get is different from what



you'd normally find on standard restaurant menus. I knew I was on to a good thing when I had the *Palak Palak Chawal*, which may now have become a feature of many a menu, but is difficult to describe, and I was taken by surprise at the effort that has gone into home inventiveness for

inspire, the two variants of the *galawat kabab*, one with mango and the other brushed with egg whites, or the *sofatarogata* a dish composed of spirally-wrapped *paneer* *rolls* made as sweet in saffron and tomato gravies dividing the plate into two halves and being *lemon* *juice* (the *masala bhajra kabab* came on a throne of onion dust) and the *vegetar* (an *Indian* *chick* *curry* served on a block of rock salt). I was equally wowed by the *street* *fresh* *potato* *masala* *corn* *and* *soy* *chicken* *gravy*, but the show-stopper for me was the *rough* *walked* *shorba* (*chicken* *and* *corn* *chick* *soy*). Lakhori has lent a new dimension to the Chandni Chowk food experience. The more you get inspired by its delicious, healthy, the merrier.

*The writer is a regular foodie.*

# CHAMBAL HAS A NEW CLAIM TO FAME NOW



Ishaan Puri launched the craft beer brand, White Rhino from the waters of the river whose ravines once provided refuge to India's infamous dacoits.

WHEN WE were young and bright-eyed, we grew up on stories of the blood-soaked exploits of the dacoits of Chambal, starting with the notorious Man Singh, but there will be a new generation that will only associate the crocodile-infested river with the craft beer named White Rhino. When Ishaan Puri left the world's largest investment manager, BlackRock, in New York City, where he was a financial analyst, to pursue his dream of producing an Indian craft beer for world-travelled young people like him, he went to several states to scout for an ideal location for his factory.

Ishaan's finally landed in Bhind, a district bordering Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, where he found the rain-fed Chambal to have the right water for his beer — its pH (the acid-alkal

balance) is near neutral, which makes it easy to treat. Beer is all about the interplay of water, malt, hops and yeast, and water is the only locally sourced ingredient going into a White Rhino. On a seven-acre plot at Malampur, Bhind, the British School and University of Pennsylvania alum-

## Ishaan gave up a financial analyst's career in NYC

hus set up the country's smallest licensed brewery with a capacity to produce 30,000 hectolitres of beer. Before taking the plunge, he studied brewing at the Brew Lab in Sunderland, UK. Hired an English brewmaster, James Garstang, and won a case in the Madhya Pradesh High Court

against the state government's sudden move to cancel the very same licences it had given out to brewers and distillers.

"Nothing could stop me from completing what I had set out to do," says Puri about his decision to slug it out in courtrooms. The case delayed the launch of the two White Rhino beers (a lager and a Belgian 'wit' beer) by a year, but when these were rolled out in Gurgaon in October 2016 (followed by Delhi in December), they became instant hits because of their light, easy-on-the-palate style, and found many takers in restaurants frequented by trendy young people. (It is too early for Ishaan to rest on his laurels — and he knows that too well, which is why he has chosen the life of a Shatahd "frequent traveller".