

## FOODGASM

I LOVE INDIAN FOOD — IT'S MY FAVOURITE CUISINE. I LOVE THE MIXTURE OF SPICES AND THE SUBTLE FLAVOURS. IT'S REALLY EROTIC; THE SPICES ARE SO SENSUOUS

JOE PERRY, Guitarist

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# When in Bikaner...

FROM MELT-IN-THE-MOUTH RASGULLAS TO REFRESHING SHERBETS AND SPECIALLY CRAFTED MEALS, THERE'S A LOT MORE ON THE FOOD MAP OF THIS CITY THAN THE FAMOUS BHUJIA

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STEP OUT of the railway station and into the age-old shop called Chotu Motu Joshi, where even if you have only Rs 10 in your pocket, you'll find something to eat. Run by Jagmohan Joshi, you are greeted by the delicious aroma of *poori-bhaji* and *bhujias*. Tins of rasgullas line the shelves. Joshi's lineage is as old as Bikaner, going back to 1488 when the town was founded by Rao Bika. Joshi inherited the shop and the business from his grandfather Chotulal Joshi who worked in the royal kitchens.

"Along with his elder brother Motulal Joshi, he started this shop while working in the royal kitchens. Now, only we (Chotulal's family) manage it. Food was very rich in those days, with halwas and other delicacies made in ghee. Even though people prefer lighter oils now, our motto, 'Shudhta ka prateek, Chotu Motu Joshi', remains intact. Purity, freshness and quality are our trademarks," elucidates Joshi.

Walking into the high-ceiling premises where all the delicacies are being made by hand and no machine is in sight, Joshi informs that the building was built by Maharaja Ganga Singh. Earlier, it was a college hostel. Workers are churning different things in huge iron kadais. The paneer for the rasgullas is also handmade and the rasgullas are cooled down with water, using huge fans.

*Bhujia* from *moth besan* are made in groundnut oil, which is what gives them that distinct

flavour. A man is rubbing the dough through a sieve over boiling oil. Anyone else would have burned their hands but this one is an expert.

There is an area where one can enjoy a plate of *puri*, cooked in ghee. Their unique speciality is the *dana methi kairi*—something close to a pickle—which is not found anywhere else. There is also a *kulfi* parlour a few steps away, where one can enjoy *badam-pista*, *kesar kulfi* and the seasonal mango one.

While Joshi's father, Gopal Joshi is into politics, his two sons have divided their portfolios. One works with his grandfather, while the other one helps Joshi run this hereditary business. They have plans to sell their special *bhujias* online soon.

## NATURAL SHERBETS

There are a lot of people at the entrance of this little shop—the locals know it as Chunnilal Tanwar's sherbet shop. Some are drinking their sherbet from *kulhads*, others are waiting while the boy behind the counter prepares a *kulhad* for them. Located at Old Jail Road, this shop has been quenching the thirst of thousands since 1939. "My father started this shop when he was just 17 years old. His father had passed away and there was no work," says Vidhan Tanwar who runs the shop with his son Vivek Tanwar. "We source natural flavours from different parts and just a tad bit of preservative is used in the bottles." Around 12 eco-friendly and natural flavours are available.

Among the most popular

sherbets in the city is *bela*, which acts as a coolant. Then there are: rose, white rose, *laung* or clove, *khus*, *kesar* milk, *paan*, *elaichi*, *saunf*, *kewra*. A *kulhad* costs as little as Rs 20 and the price of the expensive *kesar* bottle goes upto Rs 350. While he would like to spread his wings, right now he is happy offering natural thirst quenchers in Bikaner.

## GULKAND MILKSHAKE

With his roots in the ice-cream business, Jay Daga has expanded his Vardhman cafe in the last decade to include a whole range of milkshakes, cakes and bakery products. But most people visit this café in Ambedkar Circle for its fresh gulkand milkshake, in which tiny bits of fresh rose are blended into a creamy fresh mixture. "My grandfather Trilokchand Rampuria started the ice cream business around 50 years back. We make all the ice creams in our unit in Bikaner. Counting the ice creams, milkshakes, cakes, bakery items and other items served here, the number is over 250," says Daga.

There are over 50 varieties of ice creams with flavours such as *sitaphal*, *anjeer*, *thandai*, mixed fruit, pineapple—all exclusive to this city-grown brand. There are over 30 kinds of milkshakes—a sugarless one too. A cup costs as little as Rs 20, but price varies from flavour to flavour. There are takeaway packs too, along with sundaes. "We don't see anyone as competition because we believe in good food and customers will come if they like what we offer," smiles Daga.



## CAMEL MILK TREATS

Camel milk *kulfi*, flavoured milk, raw milk, tea, *lassi*, coffee... all this is served in the camel milk parlour, right next to the ticket counter of the National Research Centre on Camel in Bikaner. And it's not a pocket-heavy range—only the *kulfi* costs Rs 40, but all the other items are priced at Rs 20. It is a good idea to see the magnificent creatures up close first as the centre is open from 2 to 6 pm for visitors, and then try all these treats. Camel milk being a rarity in other parts of the country, a bite of this *kulfi* is quite an experience. It is tasty but somewhat salty. Camel milk has more protein than fat, it has probiotic qualities and is useful in managing diseases such as type 1 diabetes, tuberculosis, skin infections. People with milk allergy can also consume this milk.

## BIKAJI BHUJIAS AND MORE

Even before we knew Bikaner, we knew Haldiram Bhujjiawala. And the founder of Bikaji Foods is Shivratan Agrawal, the grandson of this legendary man. Haldiram started his *bhujia* business from a small shop in Bikaner in the 1930s. The family has spread across different parts of the country. But Agrawal has stuck to the city of his ancestors and along with his son, Deepak, he has been running Bikaji since

1987. Agrawal's state-of-the-art unit here employs close to 2,000 people. While a lot of systems are automated, the core still remains handmade savouries. Over 4,000 women across different villages in the neighbourhood supply fresh *papad* daily, which are then packaged here. The art of making sohan *pappi* is still a traditional one. Four people keep shuffling the dough till it becomes that silky, flaky, melt-in-the-mouth variety.

Bikaji has been exporting its products to the US, Australia, Europe, Thailand, Singapore and the Gulf region, besides expanding its presence in the Indian market. There are more than 150 products in its basket. On the anvil are plans to introduce dairy products and a new vermicelli range pan-India.

## CURATED FEASTS

To experience royal flavours, the luxury boutique hotel Narendra Bhawan is the place to dine in. Residence of the last maharaja of Bikaner, Narendra Singh, the hotel houses an exquisitely designed Pearls & Chiffons restaurant. At the private dine-in space here, one can experience some specially designed meals such as the 'literary dinner', meditation course, blindfold meals and even the Marwari *thali*. This is an arty affair. Enjoy the fancy crockery too.