

# Bengaluru's Bihari Boast

The Potbelly Divine woos the Garden City with authentic cuisine



By BINDU GOPAL RAO

The Bihar elections are long over. But The Potbelly Divine in Indiranagar, Bengaluru, is still getting the votes. "There are hardly any restaurants in the city offering original Bihari cuisine. Customers get to try novel dishes and flavours," says Puja Sahu who launched it with Mamta Sahu and Shivkumar. The restaurant—that opened in the Garden City just before the pandemic began—is now open to diners. Where earlier they were taking it slow with only a few dishes available, now the restaurant has taken the bold decision of going the whole hog as far as its menu is concerned. Any new endeavour requires conviction and self-belief. Puja has both. Which is why she poured all her savings into the venture. "It felt like the right thing to do. Sometimes it's important to take the plunge and that's what I did," she says.

The greatness of unexplored gastronomy is that it breaks misconceptions, crumbles clichés and brings cultural perspective. At The Potbelly Divine, recipes and flavours open the diner's palate to a little known fare



of India. The food is politically correct too—the vegetarian starters are vegan. The breads are gluten-free, cooked with a combination of rice flour and millet flours. "Our gravies are prepared with panch phoran, a mix of fennel, fenugreek, nigella, mustard and cumin seeds. The predominant element in

(Clockwise from top) The Potbelly Divine; litti chokha, Bihari chicken and mutton kebabs; an art corner

Bihari cuisine is mustard oil, and slow cooking is the principal technique of preparation," says Sahu. The eatery at Indiranagar is an offshoot of the wildly popular eponymous Delhi restaurant.

Bihari non-vegetarian cuisine gets its complexity and depth from specifically prepared khada masala, or the humble whole ground spices. Mustard oil is an acquired taste, especially for South Indians, but the IT City has enough nerds from outside to make The Potbelly Divine a literal melting pot. The wonder of Indian cuisine is the contrast between the sharp and the mellow, and litti chokha is true to its word. Undoubtedly Bihar's national food, litti is made by roasting a dough ball stuffed with sattu—a blend of ground chana dal and spices—and then dipping it in pure desi ghee. To make the chokha, mix slow-roasted aubergines, potatoes, tomatoes and spice. Traditionally, littis are roasted on cow dung cakes, giving it the characteristic smoky flavour.

Though the décor is a bit lost in translation, the food



isn't. Bachka Basket, a combination of potato, spinach, raw banana and eggplant fritters served with tomato and parwal chokha and chutney, could be a good starter. The succulent Bihari kebabs cooked over coal with the spice paste of poppy seeds, garam masala, cumin powder, et al, are served with lachha paratha. House special Ahuna mutton, slow-cooked in earthen pots, is a popular East Champaran dish. Sarson machhlis is prepared in mustard gravy. The Raspuia, a pancake of refined flour and fennel seeds cooked in ghee, dipped in sugar syrup and served with homemade kulfi is delicious.

Bihari food best complements the winters. And with December approaching, you know where to head for that smoky fest.

