

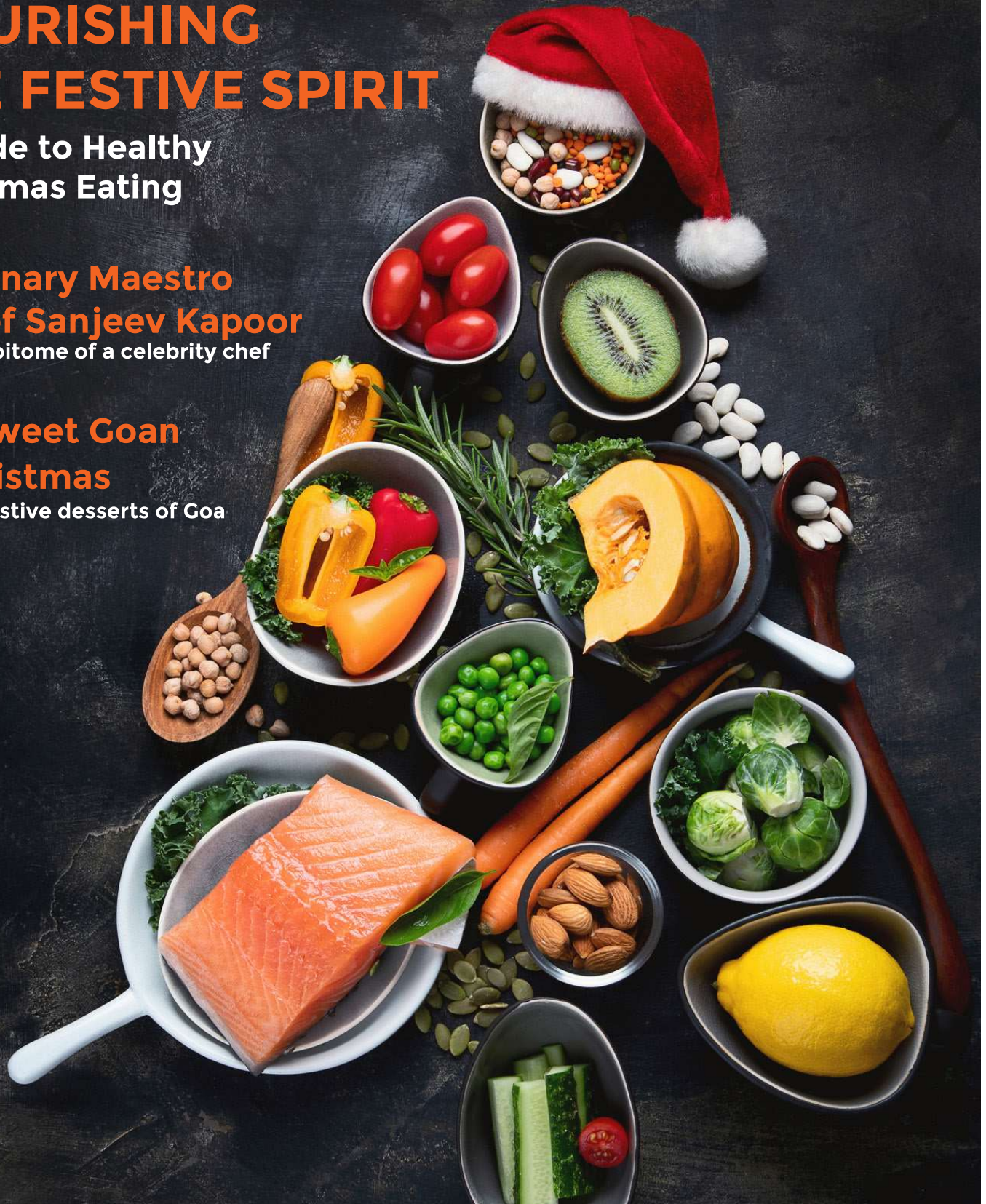
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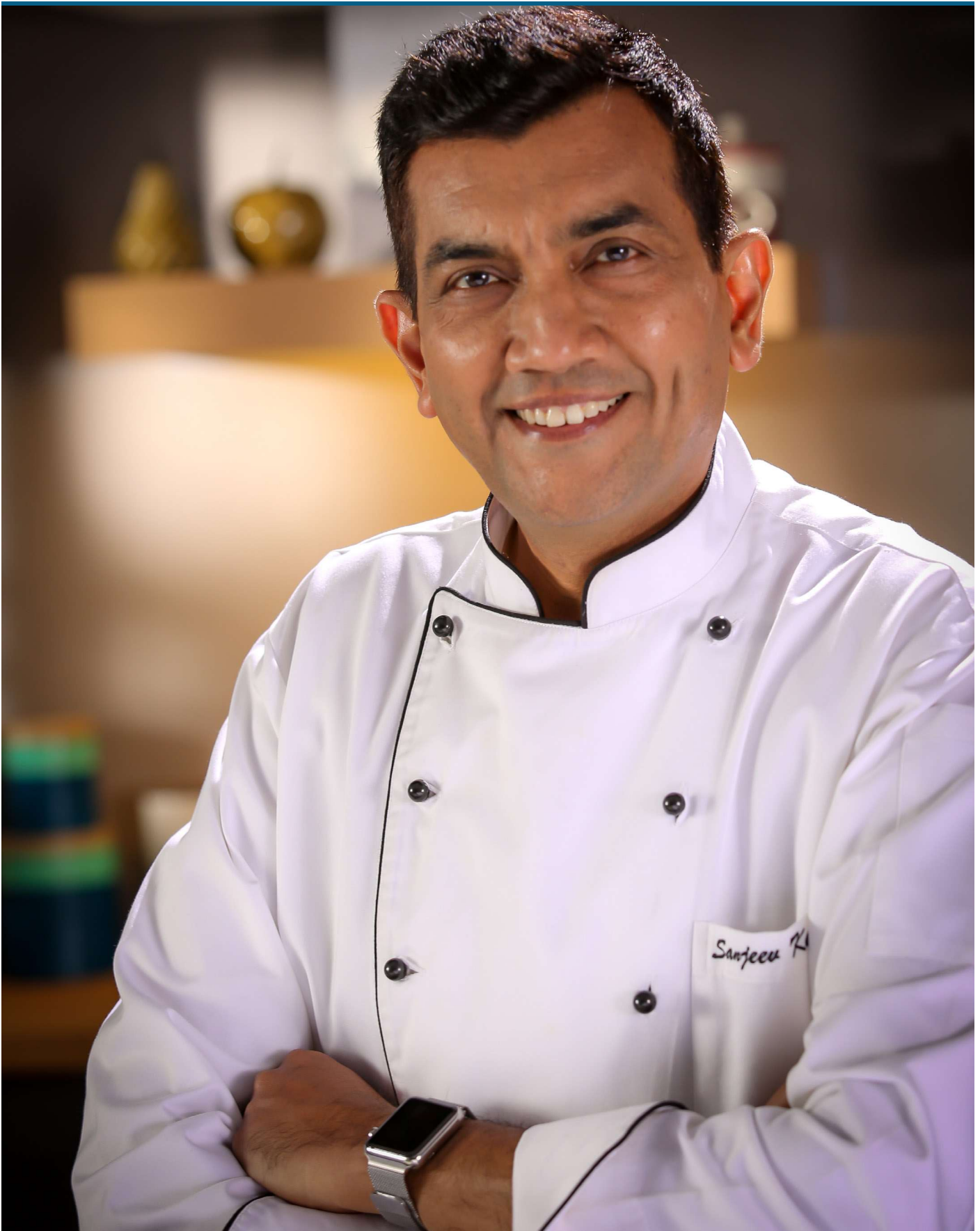
December 2023

NOURISHING THE FESTIVE SPIRIT

A Guide to Healthy
Christmas Eating

- ◆ **Culinary Maestro**
Chef Sanjeev Kapoor
The epitome of a celebrity chef
- ◆ **A Sweet Goan**
Christmas
The festive desserts of Goa





Chef Sanjeev Kapoor

The epitome of a celebrity chef

In conversation with Bindu Gopal Rao

Chef Sanjeev Kapoor is a name that hardly needs any introduction, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that he is the most well-known face of Indian cuisine in the world. If you have watched *'Khana Khazana'* the path-breaking, longest-running cookery show in Asia, you would instantly remember the charming, smiling man on the show - Sanjeev Kapoor. While that was a start, he moved from being a TV show host, to being an author of bestselling cookbooks, restaurant owner and winner of several culinary honours. He is also the only chef in the world to have his own television channel, *FoodFood*. A self-confessed gadget freak, he has created Wonderchef, a premier cookware and kitchen appliances brand and is the co-founder of *Tiny Chef*, a company working on culinary AI and ML. Recently, he hosted the world's first cookery show in Metaverse, called *'Nutraverse'* where his digital avatar cooks three healthy recipes using *Nutralite* products. He has also launched his online academy www.sanjeevkapooracademy.com. In this exclusive chat, the Padma Shri awardee, Winner of the Best Executive Chef title in India, Mercury Gold Award at IFCA Geneva and one of the seven chefs in the world with a case study published on him by Harvard Business School, tells us all about his illustrious journey to date.

Was being a Chef something you always wanted to do?

Not really as I did not even know what a Chef was and was not exposed to the professional world of cooking. I would cook at home with my parents. My brother's hobby was cooking. But it was just a hobby. He became a chartered accountant and now works as a strategy consultant. In those days, good students would either choose to become a doctor or engineer (I chose the latter). But the reason I got into the field of cooking was because I wanted to do something which was

different and no one else in the family or neighbourhood had done.

What was the kind of food you grew up eating? What do you like to eat now?

I grew up eating homestyle food, Punjabi, vegetarian - dal, roti, subzi and raita. It was a treat if rice was cooked, and it was more a Sunday celebration meal. Occasionally it would be non-vegetarian which was cooked by my dad. Exposure to foreign foods, including noodles was very limited. When we went out, we would have masala dosa, chaat, pav bhaji but I never really ate any biryani then. Now I eat everything, especially local food from the place where I am. When I am out, I prefer local food of the homestyle kind.

What is your take on fusion food?

Fusion food is something that I believe if done right can work, otherwise it can end up being confusion food. The way food grows is that it takes a lot from different cultures and geographies. For instance, tomatoes, chillies, and potatoes were not around a little over 100 years ago but they are our food today. So, who knows, maybe 100 years from now you



would have authentic biryani but made with instant noodles.

For someone who has achieved so much in the business of food, how do you look back at your journey?

I think it has been very, very satisfying. I was able to achieve so much thanks to support from my family, friends, and well-wishers. While nothing comes easy, there are a lot of struggles and a lot of hard work. But I still believe that my journey has been a bed of roses because that is my philosophy of life. This is how I see life and I believe that struggle is part of the journey, but I don't celebrate that struggle.

How is Indian food and its perception changing in India and across the world?

Today India is being looked at as a country of global dominance and food is not being left behind either. People of Indian origin and ingredients of Indian origin are being recognised more and there is more respect for it both within India and outside India also. There is a newfound pride of being an Indian and eating Indian food and that pride is likely to grow even more.

What is your food philosophy all about?

Food is all about simplicity, freshness and about being local, diverse & sustainable and that is what I believe in. It must be cooked with love; it is not only about skills and food. The soul of food is more important to me.

While reinterpreting traditional Indian food with a contemporary twist, what is the most important thing to take care of?

I think the most important thing would be not to try too hard. Food should be done in a very simple way and not be something where one feels that too much has been tried or too much effort has gone into it. We should learn to keep food simple even if we are bringing in a twist to it. That twist should bring a smile





on a person's face or make them wonder why they did not think about it.

What has been the most challenging meal you have cooked and why?

There have been so many challenging meals that I have had to prepare. Every time I had to cook for my daughters when they were young, it was challenging. It was not easy at all. For each meal that you cook, till the people have eaten it and like that food, it is a challenge. It is not whom you cook for that matters. In fact, when you cook for people whom you don't know well, it is challenging because you don't know whether you have done right or not, till they are satisfied.

Who or what inspires you?

There are many people who inspire me. To begin with my parents. My professional inspiration came from many chefs who I have worked with. My elder brother continues to inspire me because he can look at the most complex situations and break them down into simple pieces. So that has helped me in my cooking. Inspiration is not always from a person, it can be from what I see around me - a colour, a flower, or a situation.

What are your future plans?

I take one day at a time and look at life in a non-complicated way and the future is made with each day as a building block. For the next few years, I am going to focus more on health - not just my health, but the health of people at large and how food can be a big factor in that. Most of my new ventures are focusing on food as medicine. So more towards functional foods, nutraceuticals and medicines, and that's where you will see more of me in the next few