



# FORTUNE COOKIE

SOURISH BHATTACHARYYA



**W**HEN Havell Dharampura emerged out of a decrepit building dating back to 1837 — if not earlier — in one of Chandni Chowk's quieter *galis* across the road from the Jami 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 Siddhant, 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 heralded as a showpiece. An inspiration to owners of other Chandni Chowk *havelis* mentionedly listed in Gool's book *Delhi: The Emperor's City (1901-1947)* (Roli Books; 2003), to prevent their descendants from just walking away or falling into the hands of middle-tier builders.

Misgiving from this same media response in Havell Dharampura was the fact that it is also the newest jewel on the ordinary crown of Chandni Chowk. An old haunt of gastronomes, it got a new lease of life thanks to the active Chandni Chowk is famous for its galaxy of edible offerings. From *Naan*'s *dhokla* to Chandi Ram's *Rancho Naan* and Chintu's *roti*, but what it doesn't have is a modern restaurant encapsulating the culinary traditions of the heritage neighbourhood that mesh together a bouquet of influences — Mughal, Kayasth, Jain and Bauli. The dishes you get is the cross-cultural mush-ups of Haldiram's or Dewar Brothers.

The game has been plugged by Lakhori, the restaurant at Havell Dharampura named after the multi-brick traditionaly used to build Chandni Chowk's stately homes. Even on a summer day, a visit to Lakhori is a pleasure — the sunbeams from the Jami Masjid police station doesn't last more than two minutes; the by-lanes are surprisingly clean, thanks apparently to Goel's close watch on the night bournouf, and you still come across classical facades although much of the area

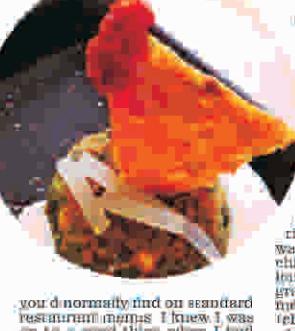
now is dominated by tame but overripe by smallness buildings.

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

**P**OPULAR IN THE months when Delhi is less wearing the courtly and leads you into the restaurant, which looks straight out of a period film, with corners lined with huge Lakhori bricks, ornate niches with black-and-white pictures of Chandni Chowk in its heyday, arched doors and arches; even one with Lord Elgin at the centre flanked by two angels inspired by European art. I was imagining how dining at Lakhori must

be like when there's a live Kathak performance in the tea-hour voguish, or how it must feel like breaking bread on the rooftop with views of Junaid Mushtaq's minarets at one end and the gleam of the golden domes of Gurudwara Sri Guruji on the other.

The food, like the restaurant's decor, combines the classic with the contemporary — and surprisingly. The menu has been put together by the Havell's guardian angel, Vijayan Goel, who, like her father, is an SRCC alumna, and also has an MBA in Finance, and also this a patrician toy bank for underprivileged children, and her mother Preeta, a professor of journalism at the School of Correspondence University of Delhi. Both being vegetarians, they opted in Vijayan'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



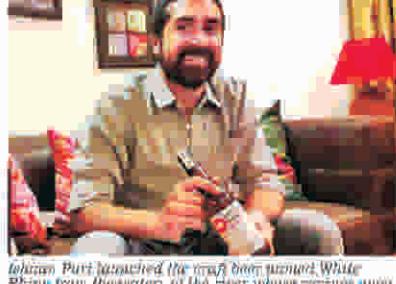
you'd normally find on standard restaurant menus. I knew I was on to a good thing when I had the *Patra-Patti Chorai*, which may now have become a feature of many a menu, but is difficult to execute, and I was taken by surprise at the effort that has gone into being inventive. For

instance, we two variants of the *gatkaab kabab*, one with mango and the other brined with sea salties or the *kolhapuri* — a dish composed of spiced wrapped paneer *kadai* mambles served in cashew and tomato gravies dividing the plate into two halves, and being become the *main course*. *Gatkaab* came on a thread of onion rings and the vegetable *anchoa* (that arrived sitting on a block of rock salt). I was equally bowled by the chutney-masala masala camel meat served in a thick mushroom gravy, but the show-stepper for me was the *murgi malai* storia chicken and even think sour.

Lakhori has left a new dimension to the Chandni Chowk food experience. The more you get inspired by its delicious example, the merrier.

The writer is a novelist and columnist

## CHAMBAL HAS A NEW CLAIM TO FAME NOW



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 Ishan 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.

Ishan's finally landed in Bhind, a district bordering Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, where he found the famed 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

has set up the country's smallest licenced 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, learned 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's 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 Shatihal frequent traveller".