

Enjoy The Taste Of Silence At MUMBAI'S MIRCHI & MIME RESTAURANT!

Text & Images Jayati Saha

Perhaps it's just a coincidence. But once you notice it, you can't unsee it.

The restaurant sits between two poles – on one side, the ever-busy highway and on the other, the introverted Hiranandani Gardens. As if Mirchi & Mime – the flavour of the season in the Mumbai culinary circuit – wants to strike a balance between the loud mainstream and the silent side-streets.

If you reach the place early evening, as dusk descends on the pretty lake that's on the other side of the highway, you want to stand outside for a moment, soaking in the atmosphere.

It's all simple straight lines from the outside, as if telling the guest

in advance that what she sees is what she'll get. And right there, on the porch, you can sit with the straight-talking co-founder, Prashant. And hear his story over a drink.

He looks more a quiet, creative sort, not a flamboyant restaurateur as you'd expect. And his story lacks the melodrama that you had come to hear. 'It's about building a profitable business first', he says. It's quite clear that he hasn't bought the good Samaritan praises heaped on him regularly these days.

'But it's also about giving the deaf and the mute a platform, getting them into the mainstream', he adds, the goodness of the motive brushed under business-speak.

Later, when dusk gives way to darkness, you step in. And it's all bright and cheerful and open inside, just like its current -famous waiters. They look genuinely happy as they meet you at your table, the smile never leaving their faces as they interact with you, through a menu of simple gestures. And you have a startling realisation – that this bunch is probably the most eloquent of waiters you've ever met.

'They are happy because they have finally found self-worth', Prashant had said earlier, 'and our attrition rate is less than 3%', had come the quick rejoinder – the empirical data to balance out the emotion.

Then when they walk away with



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A split second storyteller who tells stories without saying a single word, photo-artist Jayati Saha of India, amazes with her frames of nuanced light and shadow, seamlessly fusing her art with technical finesse. Exhibited and owned worldwide, she is a much-in-demand artist, teacher and competition judge. Her extremely sensitive eye has captured moments glistening with human emotions and her forte is seeing the unseen and the unnoticed. Based out of Kolkata, India, Jayati is peripatetic and her journeys have taken her to the India not known or seen by many. Apart from being a contributor at the Getty Images Inc., USA, she was also the adjudicator at the Photography competition hosted by the SAARC, 2015.





your order, you notice the mantra of their new lives, emblazoned in red on their backs. And there's pride and challenge in that statement.

As you look around, you see that you're not alone in your dumb foundedness. The guests at other tables all stare at the superheroes assigned to them, following every gesture, passionate enough to rival an artist's expression.

The spice of the dish comes alive in exaggerated scowls and mudras, the sweetness of the dessert in cloying grins. And the strength or mildness of the liquors are expressed by hilarious mimicry of drunkenness. You get that the 'mime' in the brand name is not just a pretty word. It means serious action around here.

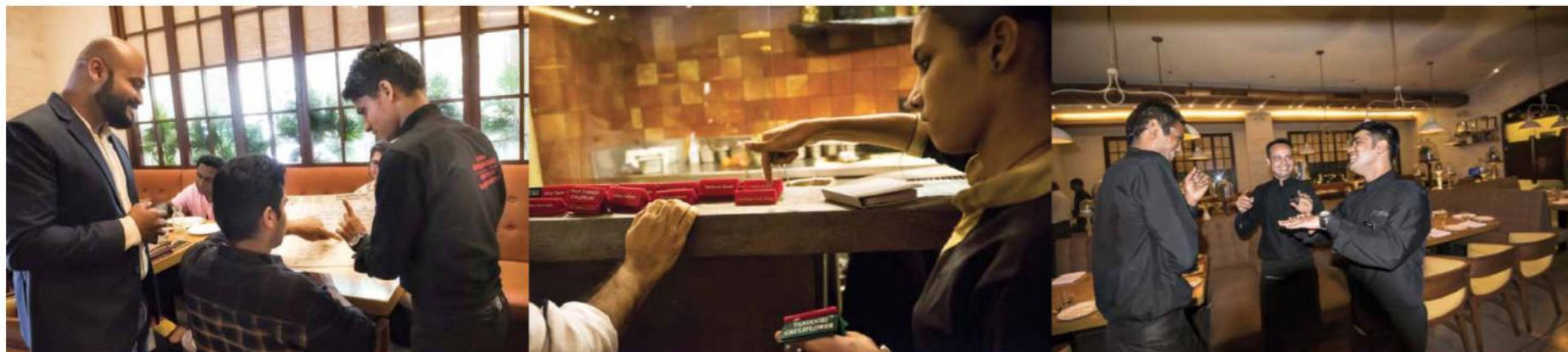
And when you see the waiters 'talking' to each other across the floor, you sense that there's more

than information that's passing between nimble fingers and expressive eyes. It feels like they are trading jokes as well, as folks who love their jobs usually do.

'What's been the biggest rewarding moment...', you had asked. Prashant didn't have to think too hard on this. And he had recounted an incident when he discovered that one of the waiters, who was a dependent on his family, had become the sole breadwinner in a span of a few months.

'But we're more interested in their ability than their disability', he course-corrects, and the conversation moved quickly to business again. About how the food is conceived of and prepared in precise temperatures, about drawing on the dual experiences of business management and working with Michelin chefs, and about plans of expanding into many Mirchis & Mimes, across





India and abroad, along with extending the trademark into new-age pubs called Madeira & Mime.

Close to midnight, as you prepare to leave, your waiter sees you off at the door. He touches his hand to his chest and flings something invisible at you, as a gesture of thanks and goodbye.

'But surely there were some challenges in your journey...' you had pressed on earlier. 'It was winning their trust, opening them up', Prashant had said. That made

you suspect something and you had asked if he knows sign language. 'I've had to learn', he said, 'to be one of them'.

And at that instant, as you walk out the door into the silent night, you've drawn your conclusion. That despite all its hard-nosed efforts at balance, the idea of Mirchi & Mime leans a bit to the left – where the heart is. But perhaps that's quite alright, because things straight and true come from that location of the human anatomy. 

