

Dang women find route to empowerment through the stomach

Author - Yagnesh Mehta, Published on - 30.11.2015

A Food Stall's Success At A Tribal Fair In 2006 Led To A Restaurant Chain

Freshly cooked traditional tribal food served to people visiting a fair in Dang around nine years ago was such a hit that it led to women's empowerment through a chain of restaurants. The group of women that had set up the stall at the tribal fair decided to go ahead and capitalize on its success. In 2006, they opened a restaurant -Nahri-at Gangpur village on Vansda-Dharampur Road. The eatery now serves travellers round the year. Following its success, six more branches of the restaurant were opened in the tribal region and all are highly successful. These branches include one in neighbouring Silvassa, in the Union territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli (DNH). A social scientist studying the tribal region of South Gujarat says that Nahri -it means 'meal' in tribal language -is popular with a large number of tourists who visit Saputara and other tourist attractions in Dang. In 2006, when the first Nahri restaurant opened in Gangpur village, the women developed it as a traditional tribal hut-like structure. Decorated with tribal paintings, the restaurant is now run by 17 women who serve more than 3,000 customers every month. The restaurant serves authentic tribal food such as Indian bread made of Nagli (ragi), finger millet, rice, baboo vegetable and black gram daal. Women in red saris -it is their dress code -sing while cooking. This leaves visitors with a memorable experience. Nimisha Thorat, president of Jay Ambe Mahila Mandal that runs Nahri at Gangpur, said that visitors keep asking questions about Nagli rotla and baboo vegetable after they have eaten from Dangi thali. "All of them have tasted it for the first time in their lives and they always promise to return," said Thorat. Among dishes exclusive to Nahri are various types of forest bhajis, roots and even mushrooms that are offered seasonally. "We offer seasonal vegetables that are not available outside Dang. We use only freshly picked vegetables," said Thorat. Satyakam Joshi, director of Centre for Social Studies, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, said Nahri restaurant is a model for women's empowerment and should be replicated in other parts of the state too. "It has lifted the social status of women and they have greater say in decision-making," said Joshi. This initiative has also bridged the urban-tribal divide and brought both populations closer to each other. On a holiday, a long queue of cars waits outside Nahri for up to an hour for their Dangi thali. Kaushik Patel, a businessman, said he visits Dang every month just to eat at Nahri. "This food is not available anywhere else and the women serve it like a mother," Patel said.



Women working in the kitchen of Nahri; (R) A diner at the restaurant with its tribal-themed decor

First published by *The Times Group e-paper*