

THE PIONEER

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Foody-daddy Sanjay Bose

Savouring the delicacies of chaat at roadside stalls was a pleasure denied to me as a kid. Even mentioning the thought of having gol gappas and papri chaat at Munna's makeshift establishment would raise such a storm at home that Hurricane Jane would seem like a balmy summer breeze in comparison.

My father would normally inaugurate the process of curbing such undesirable tendencies in his first-born. He would launch into his eloquent best on the hygienic standards of such stalls, with special references to Munna's plates and glasses and the appalling condition of what Munna euphemistically called his kitchen.

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My mother would then join in with tearful reproaches on whether I found her cooking so bad that I preferred Munna's food to hers. Not one to be left out of such a golden opportunity to put me in my place, my younger brother would pipe in and helpfully provide information on any similar tendencies that I might have shown in the recent past. All this would reduce me to such a nervous wreck that I would wonder why I even brought up the topic in the first place.

SUNDAY PIONEER

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Not that this would entirely curb my hankering for such delicacies. I would still occasionally venture out under the cover of darkness to sample the forbidden fruit of Munna's labours. Still, eating chaat loses some of its charm when one has to do it furtively wearing a jacket with the hood up on a steamy summer night! To rub things in, my friends would even suggest my hiding behind a false beard and moustache while out on such ventures. In spite of all this, I would keep my spirits up by telling myself that a time would come when I would be able eat chaat openly without fear of censure and retribution.

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Unfortunately, the circle of life is a peculiar one and that time never really came. After I got married, I tried introducing my wife to the pleasures of eating 'chat' at roadside stalls. Not only did she give an encore of what my father and mother used to say but she also complained that I was being a cheap-skate if I thought that that was the way to take a lady out in the evenings.

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Now with my teenage daughter showing the same unhealthy chaat-loving tendencies as her father (must be something in the genes), I find myself launching into diatribes against eating at such places.

GAMES

JACKPOT
BLACKJACK

It is not that I have rid myself completely of my passion for chaat yet. Munna is long gone and is probably running his restaurant somewhere up there under the disapproving eyes of St. Peter. Fortunately, he has left a successor behind, who still wields some of the magic skill. Sometimes, when the chaat-lust is upon me, I still sneak out to furtively sample his wares under the cover of darkness. The only thing that terrifies me is that one of these days, I might encounter my daughter and her friends eating there as well.

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