

## **Interview with Rashid Irani, Brabourne Café, Dhobi Talao**

**25<sup>th</sup> April, 2007**

**Interviewer Bruce Carter**

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My name is Rashid Irani, our family name is actually Bahmani. A lot of Iranis are recognized as Irani, it's a common surname. But a lot of Iranis in Bombay, from the time I was a child have kept, and I am one of them, Irani.

So, I actually found out I had a family surname when I tried to get an Iranian passport. Til then I didn't even know that I had an actual surname, Bahmain. I always thought of myself as Irani..

**RASHID WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?**

Very much in Bombay all of my life, I went to school at St Xaviers School, a Jesuit school, I matriculated in 1963, and uh, joined the Commerce College a second or third level commerce college, trained actually as an accountant, did my graduation in what is called Bachelor of Commerce, in 1967.

**WHAT PART OF BOMBAY DID YOU GROW UP IN?**

Well my very first years, maybe four or five years, my parents used to live in a place in a kind of sprawling chawl, which is a huge kind of you know, number of flats, a number of families occupying those flats, and this was at what is called Fort Market, very close to Flora Fountain, and which was predominantly Parsi and Catholic at that point of time.

### **MOST OF THE PEOPLE IVING WITH YOU THERE WERE ZOROASTRIANS?**

In the building, a huge building, I grew up with a lot of Parsi people around me, this, I am talking to the time I was maybe 4 or 5 years old. Then my parents moved to a 2 room, 1 room flat actually, almost diagonally opposite my shop on the right hand side, where I grew up again with Parsi families, and I used to spend maybe 4,5 years growing up there and subsequently they moved to this place I am still residing which was actually the family home which is very close to my shop, diametrically on the left, a few minutes away.

### **SO IT'S IN DHOBI TALAO?**

Ya, Fort Market and then Dhobi Talao.

### **PEOPLE TELL ME DHOBI TALAO WAS A PREDOMINANTLY GOAN AND ZOROASTRIAN AREA**

That's right, that's very correct, it was a predominantly Catholic and Zoroastrian area; Catholics for the reason that in those days Goa was not connected by air from Bombay, and the majority of the Goan's are, and still are, employed on ships, in all categories, so

whenever they would sign off from a ship they would land up in Dhobi Talao, this was the place where there are various what I think are called in Konkan language *coors*

Communities, living quarters, so in one HUGE room each person is allotted a bed, and a locker kind of thing to put his belongings, so what would happen is the moment they would sign off the ship they would temporarily stay here til they made arrangements to go to Goa. So this is one of the reasons why, and there are other residences here also, Catholics, and of course plenty of Zoroastrians, at that period.

**OKAY, SO YOUR PARENTS FAMILY, HOW FAR DID THEIR ROOTS GO BACK IN INDIA?**

Well my father actually emigrated from Iran, in the late '20s I would say, roughly, like most Iranians of that time he came from the main centre, being Yazd, villages in and around Yazd, most of the Iranis come from there, it was quite an arduous journey coming to India via Pakistan, and they got into a few difficulties but they landed up in Bombay, and they started these restaurants, mainly these tea shops and provision stores, and they succeeded in business. My father as I said his parents were in Iran, so he had deep roots in Iran, once here, I mean he stayed on for the rest of his life, with occasional visits back too.

**SO HE DID GO BACK TO IRAN?**

Yes.

**DO YOU THINK THE IRANIS THAT CAME IN THAT WAVE SHED, OR TOOK ON...MELED INTO SOCIETY AND TOOK ON INDIAN WAYS AND ..**

From what I have seen I think they did, they kind of melded into the surroundings quite comfortably, because of the shop, and I think that is one of the best things about running a business like this is you, you come into contact with a wide spectrum of people on a daily basis, so you have to per se, interact with them, otherwise you are not going to succeed, in the business you are running.

So, ah, I think most of the Iranians of course they were very very hard working, but they definitely had, despite not having, education in the normal sense of the term, they had tremendous business acumen, they were really hardworking.

Most Iranians like my parents slogged their lives; the shop was their be all and end all – they would spend at least maybe 16 to 18 hours 7 days a week 365 days a year, but one of the things of course that was maybe happening in those days was that each of these restaurants, they were rarely singularly owned, they were not single proprietors; there would always normally be a partnership between 3 Iranians, and more, sometimes.

So what would happen is once a year maybe, or once every two years, one of the partners would take a long break – an extended vacation of a month, or two months, for instance in our case when we were going ...I and my 2 brothers, my father and mother invariably took us for a holiday during our school vacation, mainly to this lovely place called Devlani which is an army cantonment about four hours away, and to date I have very very fond memories of that place.

## **HOW LONG WOULD YOU GO FOR?**

For about a month, 20 days to a month and it was just marvelous, as children marvelous.

## **WHAT WOULD YOU DO UP THERE?**

Well mainly we lived in a place that was like a sanitarium, which had to be booked in advance, and the living quarters would be given to you for a month at a stretch, and there would be three or four such living quarters in that complex, so a lot of children would be there we would play games, most of us would cycle a hell of a lot, cycling into the distant suburbs of Devlani, go to the cantonement area and by that time, I was in my 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> standard, I had already become a movie freak, mad about American film, and one of the great things about going to Devlani was going to a couple of theatres, one of them especially which no longer exists probably, called Cathay, and it was almost exclusively run for the Army personnel, so, but, the public could pay and go see films, so I have some lovely memories of going to that cinema, which would play obscure American and British films, which somehow never played Bombay.

## **WHAT SORTS OF FILMS? FOR EXAMPLE..**

One of the films which has a lasting impression on me, I am not sure what it would be like today, this was, God forbid, years ago, I saw a British film called TUNES OF GLORY, with Alec Guinness, and at that point I had never seen a drama with such searing performances, both Mills and Alec Guinness were burning (??) away.

And like that I have seen quite a lot of films there like that, I cannot recollect the titles, but there were films that did not normally play the major metropolitan cities I saw there.

**SO THE NAME OF THIS CINEMA**

Cathay, c-a-t-h-a-y

**AND THE FAMILIES YOU WERE WITH..**

They were mainly Parsis and Irani Zoroastrians, yeah.

**SO GETTING ON TO THE LATTER GENERATION, THE IRANIS CAME LATER, THE PARSIS MUCH EARLIER, ARE THEIR DIFFERENCES IN THOSE COMMUNITIES, THE WAY THEY SEE EACH OTHER, THE WAY THE PARSIS SEE THE IRANIS ?**

I think there is a difference, today much more nominal, of course they profess the same religion, they worship fire, they go to the fire temples, but there is as I said a difference in the rituals for instance. Some of the rituals which the Parsis performed, from my childhood memories, were different and vice versa – Iranians have some rituals I have never known the Parsis to perform. But otherwise they are very very close, but I also feel that the Parsi community it was here of course centuries earlier, and it was a very very prosperous and intelligent community, they would in a way, be condescending towards Iranis, in a way, this is my feeling.

One of the things, I don't know if it originated with the Parsis or the Catholics or the Hindus, most likely the Parsis, and it still exists today, the Iranis are called *junglees*. I suppose you know what that means?

### **YOU TELL ME**

They are stupid, they are idiots, you know it's a kind of slang, used in India..

### **FOOLISH MEN?**

Foolish. They are foolish. And one of the reasons for this I think is that the Iranians were not educated in the accepted sense of the term, and they were not very articulate people in certain respects. So one of the things that the eklder generations of Iranis would say is that we "drink food and eat tea", which has become a running joke for decades. In Gujurati it says Chai k////

Its like.. you know it's a mis-articulation basically. I think sometimes the Irani community gets tired of being seen as a little mad.

### **SO YOU ARE SAYING THERE IS SOME ILL-FEELING?**

I may be wrong, but I feel there is. One of my other strong memories is going to school and I had a class teacher a Mr ////////. I still remember his name, he was fearsome, but he was also...I grew to get fond of him eventually, and uh, well, this day, on the very first

day of class, when he was reading out the roll, he came to my name Rashid Irani, and he asked me ‘what do your parents do?’ so I said “my father runs a tea shop”, so from that time on, he would invariably in class refer to me as ‘chaiwalla’ – a chaiwalla is someone who makes and sells tea. You know, at first I was really riled, especially since some of the other students, I mean my class mates also, were teasing me and calling me ‘chaiwalla’

### **HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN THIS HAPPENED?**

In the 9<sup>th</sup> standard, must be, about 12 years maybe.

### **SO YOU WERE HUMILIATED BY IT?**

I was, I was angry at him, and since he was the teacher I couldn’t do anything, and worse too when some of my class mates started calling me ..

It was only later, a few months down the line, that I realized that this was his way of addressing all Iranians; a couple of my Irani friends who were 1 year senior, you know at one point they said ‘why are you getting upset, he called us also a chaiwalla’ so I learnt to kind of take it.

Funnily later, what really attracted me to this teacher was that he taught poetry so beautifully – just to here him intone Wordsworth and Shelley, Keats and Tennyson which was part of the curriculum in class, and he had that booming sonorous voice, you know like only those old timers do, and my earliest experiences appreciating poetry were with him, and I was fascinated, I was a good student of English, and in the beginning while I



didn't understand the nuances per se, but the sheer language, the sheer sonority of this man reading poetry in class, got me hooked to poetry, and, you know it made me almost forgive him for calling me 'chaiwalla', and this thing continued for a long time, until I passed out and went beyond school.

**GETTING BACK TO YOUR FAMILY, YOUR FATHER'S NAME WAS RUSTOM**

Rustom, yes.

**AND HIS MIDDLE NAME..**

Aspandiar

**AND YOUR MOTHER'S NAME WAS..**

Gulchar

**AND THEY MET HERE IN BOMBAY?**

Ya, very much here in Bombay. My mother was always fond of telling me, I am a batchelor, and my mother was always fond of telling me that us, you know because I would always kind of chide her when she would try to get me married off, I would say I would prefer to fall in love and marry someone of my choice, and she would always chide

me and say 'love comes afterwards' – sometimes it is better to marry someone your parents choose, because evidently she had her eye on another Iranian for many, many years, a long time. But somehow that didn't materialize, and just on the rebound almost she gave into her own mother's suggestion that she marry my father, and she would  
my father when they first met, but they married and lived a beautiful life

**SO HER PARENT'S WERE MIGRANTS FROM IRAN?**

Yes, they were, but they had come I think a little earlier than my father, I mean my grandmother ..(???)

**SO DO YOU KNOW WHAT YEAR YOUR FATHER OPENED THE STORE?**

Well he actually didn't open it, he joined as a partner almost a year after it started, from my knowledge it started in 1932, and my father became a partner in 1934.

**AND DO YOU KNOW WHO HE WAS PARTNER WITH?**

At that point I am not sure, a guy called Jahangir I think sold his share to my father, but I might be wrong. A part of his share to my father..

**AND THE STORE THEN WAS PROVISIONS?..**

Everything, everything. We were full-fledged provision stores until the 1980s; from the beginning until the 1980s. So our main business was tea, snacks and provisions.

**OMELETTES, BUN MASKA..**

Everything, omelettes, bun maska, brun maska, biscuits, all variety of biscuits, cakes, pastries, in those days

**WERE YOU BAKING THOSE ON SITE?**

Earlier in the 50s we had a small oven, not a small, a big oven, where we used to make our products here, then we gave it up and started a bakery of our own, which is in Chira Bazaar about 20 minutes from here, and most of our stuff would be baked there, and we would take from other bakeries also – pastries, cakes, all manner of stuff.

**ITS BEEN SAID THAT SOME PEOPLE TYHINK THE IRANI CAFÉ BROKE DOWN SOME BARRIERS IN BOMBAY BECAUSE THE IRANIS DIDN'T CARE WHO THEY WERE SERVING..**

That could be true..

**AND THAT YOU WOULD GET RICH PEOPLE, POOR PEOPLE.**

Yeah, absolutely, though I am told, again, I don't know (for sure), there was a subtle kind of distinction, for instance in those days I am told certain Irani establishments including my own I am told, had a certain kind of cup to distinguish the elite, lets say, or the Parsi..

### **I BELIEVE THAT WAS A BRITISH LAW?**

During the British era, something like that. Now I have never seen this first hand, but this is what happened, but other than that as long as the cash counters were ringing they had no problems about serving anyone; that's one of the good things about Iranis

### **AND NEWSPAPERS WERE..**

Oh yeah, freely available, you could sit on a table with just one cup of tea and read the newspaper for hours on end, and you could be sure that you would never be asked to leave – that was one of the great things, so it became a kind of meeting point for a lot of people from the innocuous debates to the more kind of intellectual discourses, everything took place within the confines of the Irani café

### **AND YOU VERY MUCH HAD REGULARS..**

Very, very much, we did as did I am am sure most Irani establishments

**RASHID YOU MENTIONED TO ME THAT YOU THOUGHT YOUR PARENTS REALLY WORKED HARD AT BUILDING THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CUSTOMERS – THEY WERE VERY ADEPT AT DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP..**

It was I think in my father, my mother of course rarely stepped into the shop, I mean if ever, that was the thing with Iranian women in those days was they would rarely even step into the establishment, now of course things have changed, but uh my father, and his partners, were very adept at building up a relationship, building up a kind of almost familial friendship with regular customers and the customers would look forward to chatting with the proprietor across the counter, you know this is basically innocuous stuff – who did what to when today, or yesterday, and what is the state of the city, that kind of thing they were quite innocuous, but at the same time it was very, very important to build up that kind of relationship and it was natural between my father and his customers and with the other partners I have seen it..

**SO HE DIDN'T HAVE TO WORK AT IT, IT JUST CAME TO HIM, IT WAS A SKILL HE HAD..**

I think it just came to him – I mean then you know especially with the lower middle class, with the poor, you know he was very good with children for instance. One of the things we used to have was these huge jars

**BURNIS?**

Burnis yes, and today some of my senior customers come and tell me that they remember well my father picking up a sweet or two and giving it to them invariably

whenever they came with their parents. Of course they are now 60 or 70 plus themselves, but they remember my father taking out a sweet from the burni and giving it out – and they did it to a lot of people. It was also a way I think of attracting customers, keeping the parents happy, knowing that there was some kind of personalized attention, which was there, a caring.. They were being sold these sweets but for little children they just gave them out.

**YOU MENTIONED RASHID THAT YOU THINK THE WHOLE IRANI CAFÉ THING HAS BEEN 'DONE TO DEATH' AS YOU PUT IT**

Yes, and I still do..

**JUST EXPAND ON THAT A LITTLE BIT ..**

I believe that there has been a sudden resurgence in the Irani café, now that very obviously it is a disappearing trend, we are a diminishing community, and I find it, everyone wants to come and talk about the Irani café, and they are looking at it very superficially. Everybody knows that part of the Irani café ambience was the marble topped tables and the bentwood chairs, but uh, very few people I think have bothered, especially earlier, to do any kind of concerted oral history, of the Iranians, first generation Iranians who came and nobody ever bothered and I know from my experiences from my not so much my father, but one of my other senior partners, they have a wealth of anecdotal memories, whether it was spending the war years in India, or dealing with the British Raj, on a day to day basis..

## HOW DID THAT MANIFEST, WHAT..

I mean I have very vague memories, but they would talk about 'glory days', you know they perceived it to be glory days, that there was a lot of freedom, economic and otherwise, uh I think increasingly as time went by they became more and more disillusioned, because uh, you know India changed. It gained independence and for a while it was okay, but then the whole regiment of restauranting, it was very very simple, there were not that many laws, there were not that many taxes, there were not many hassles, let's put it .

Though it is a large place, these were very small establishments, and nobody really kind of bothered so long as you were you know, you served the people. I think over the years (Irani café owners) incomes started dwindling, there were more and more hassles from the government, as in taxes, like for instance my partner and my father would say, during the war years they would serve all kinds of British lagers, beers, it was all available without any kind of license, you know so they felt the pinch I think, and more importantly as they grew up and their children, one the most amazing things, one of the things I always admired was that despite coming from a relatively working class background, and despite working 16, 18 hours a day and making money, they saw to it that their children were educated well, which is one thing I really admire.

Ironically in the long run it went against them, in the sense that you know they found out to their horror that their children were not interested in carrying on business, they just were not. Which has led to the decline actually, but at the same time most of the children a lot the children of my partners they are well settled in England, Canada, Australia, they are professionals, well settled professionals, doctors, architects, lawyers etc. And that's a great thing.

**HOW MANY PARTNERS DO YOU HAVE IN THE RESTAURANT NOW?**

Four, including me. My brother and I have 1 share jointly; I represent my brother.

**YOU HAVE 2 BROTHERS?**

I have 3 brothers, but the youngest one expired 10 years ago in an accident, 1 of them is settled in Iran for many years

**WHEREABOUTS?**

In Tehran

**SO YOU ARE IN REGULAR TOUCH?**

Yes. He hasn't come here in the last 6 or 7 years..

**HE HAS NO REGRETS ABOUT GOING TO IRAN?**

No.



**WHAT IS HE DOING IN IRAN?**

He works as a personnel manager in Iran Air, the national airlines.

**OKAY, AND THEN THERE IS YOUR BROTHER AND YOURSELF HERE**

Yes.

**AND YOUR BROTHER WORKS HERE AT THE CAFÉ?**

That's right

**HIS NAME IS?**

Sharukh

**I KNOW THAT IN THE 70s THERE WAS PROHIBITION, AND LICENSES CAME IN TO SELL ALCOHOL, AND YOU PEOPLE DECIDED TO GO DOWN THAT PATH**

Yes. In our particular case we decided rather late, but some of the Irani restaurants in the vicinity jumped on it almost as soon as it came into effect, which was a very,very wise decision because they took on a license when it was 2 lakhs..

**SO THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN..**

In about '75

**WHEN DID YOU TAKE A LICENSE?**

May '84

**AND THAT WAS TO SELL BEER ONLY?**

Only, yes .And to date we have maintained that, just to sell beer.

**DID THAT IMPACT ON BUSINESS?**

Initially – we were doing quite well for the first 10 years or so, ahhh, of course our bakery and provisions business suffered, but it was offset by our sale of beer. And at that time, what worked in our favour, and all the other places too, was that there was nil sales tax until about 19//// But once sales tax came it, that really slugged us.

**HAS THAT RESULTED IN A LOT MORE PAPER WORK?**

Also, yes. Mainly it is no longer economically viable, to pay 20% to the government, and pay a license fee of a lakh (100 000) per annum.

**HOW MANY STAFF DO YOU HAVE NOW?**

About 8 to 9, sometimes 10..

**AND THAT IS GENERALLY THROUGH WORD OF MOUTH, YOU GET PEOPLE?**

Yeah, yeah, we never have problems getting staff.

**IN YOUR FATHERS TIME THERE WERE IRANI'S WORKING HERE?**

Yaar,yaar they would always have a manager or two, who would be Iranians, so we had a history of Iranians working here for a while

**ALMOST LIKE A TRAINING GROUND..**

Almost like a training ground..

**OKAY, WHAT'S THE MOST POPULAR DISH ON THE MENU?**

Well I would say our Ma// Dahl, which is a lentil, black lentil dahl that is probably the most popular

**AND WHAT DOES THAT SELL FOR?**

12 rupees

**AND WHAT DOES A CHAI SELL FOR?**

5 rupees

**A BUN MASKA?**

That, we have just raised it to ten. It used to be eight.

**DID YOU SPEND MUCH TIME HERE AT THE RESTAURANT WHEN YOU WERE A KID, AFTER SCHOOL AND THAT SORT OF THING?**

I used to drop in, but that would be just for an hour, even when I went to college I would just come for half an hour, one hour or so. Then from 1985 I devoted myself to it entirely.

**HOW GREAT WAS THAT DECISION FOR YOU? A HARD DECISION TO MAKE OR JUST A PRACTICAL DECISION?**

No, not hard, it was a practical decision. I was working in a shipping company for 17 1/2 years, as a deputy accountant, and I left that job, and I had no regrets.

**NO?**

No. It gave me more freedom for instance. And for a while as well, it was definitely better economically; its only in the last 5,6,7 years that we really hit rock bottom. Till then, it was fine. Also my other partners were there so I had a lot of help, and then of course they grew..they aged, so now it is I and my brother looking after this full time. And it is very exhausting.

**HOW MANY DAYS A WEEK ARE YOU WORKING?**

Seven. 365 days. I just take off maybe 2 or 3 times a year to attend a film festival.

**WHICH FILM FESTIVALS DO YOU GO TO?**

The one in Delhi, the official one in Goa, which I regret going to actually, and of course for me the one that is unarguably the finest is the one in Trivandrum, Kerala.

**YOU MUST ENJOY IMMENSELY GETTING OUT OF BOMBAY AND GETTING DOWN TO KERALA?**

Oh yeah, but then of course I am watching 4 films a day. So its exhausting also, but in a different kind of way.

**DO YOU GO WITH FRIENDS?**

Yeah. A group of film buffs.

**DO YOU EVER MEET HERE?**

Yes, occasionally.

**WHEN IT HAPPENS IT HAPPENS..**

People sometimes drop in and chat, have a chai and I have one friend who is a regular, he is a Hollywood movie buff, he turns up every afternoon.

**YOU WOULDN'T DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS A HOLYWOOD MOVIE BUFF?**

I am, but I am a movie buff, period.

Just living becomes an issue, you know, and there are so few people which have captured the kind of diversity of India and its people, its places, very, very few people, so few films. Very few people bother with simple stories about human beings.

**HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF BOMBAY?**

Well, by nature I am a guarded kind of pessimist, but at the same time I am resigned; lets put it this way very often I see beauty in simple things, which is what I miss in cinema.

**AND HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE OF MUMBAI'S IRANI CAFES?**

Bleak, very bleak, unless there is a sea change. I mean I don't see them..but that's, that's part of change, part of natural progression, so I don't have any qualms or regrets about it

**YOU'RE NOT SENTIMENTAL ABOUT IT AT ALL?**

Not really, not really. I mean, it gave me a few glorious years, in that way I tend to be content with little. I am not a very ambitious person, so long as I get to the cinema and to read my books, meet friends..

**WHO DO YOU THINK WOULD BE THE OLDEST CUSTOMER YOU'VE GOT THAT IS STILL COMING IN HERE?**

There would be quite a few actually. Among the Parsis there are a couple. There is one whose name is Maneck Sadra he is a Parsi gentleman, must be now close to 78,79, comes here everyday and he's been doing it for years and years and years, he would certainly be the oldest customer we have. He just comes in for a cup of tea. And to read the paper.

**DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE ARTWORKS ON THE WALL, WHO DID THEM?**

Not really. They have been there ever since I remember, but as to who did them I do not know. I am sure roadside artists of that era there would have been quite a few.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK MORALE IS LIKE IN THE IRANI COMMUNITY?**

People are quite high in that sense. I mean they are quite perky, most of them.

**JUST DOING IT, LIVING THEIR LIVES..**

Yeah, yeah, yeah There are sometimes quarrels and sometimes people who are too full of themselves..



## **IN WHAT WAY?**

Having gained financial success I think a lot of them tend to forget where they came from. I mean this might sound stupid, but they forget, you know, their roots, how much people struggled.

The very fact that the second or third generation is not interested, which is fine by me, I think it is great, they have gone on to do their own thing, but you have to remember where this all came from. It didn't come out of thin air. That's a good thing. In my case 'cos my father died very, very young, I have always been amazed how my mother grudgingly kind of encouraged my reading habits, she always told me you are crazy, but at the same time she grudgingly allowed me to indulge in my passions, which is a very, very good thing in the long run I think it has helped immensely.

This whole area has undergone, is undergoing rapid change.

## **HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE DHOBI TALAO NOW?**

Increasingly a commercial hub. Not cultural at all. Earlier it was predominantly a residential area, not it is commercial. Within a decade I can see a whole slew of malls dotting the skyline around here. We are next in line, I suppose.

[Discussion about shopping malls.. "a non-existent experience']

**DOES IT BLOW YOU AWAY THE AMOUNT OF MONEY SOME PEOPLE SEEM TO HAVE AT THE MOMENT?**

Absolutely. And I have always increasingly felt, maybe it is because I am not a big spender, I spend on books..

**YOU ARE NOT A MATERIALIST?**

Yes, if you want to put it that way. What really amazes me is how much money , you know take a mega-star, take a big industrialist, I mean how many cars can they have? How many flats and apartments can you have? How many curios can you have? I know its absurd coming from me, because I am associated with films and books, but this I just cannot understand.

**I THINK THE CLICHÉ IS THE MORE YOU HAVE THE MORE YOU WANT!**

Yeah but just how much, uh?..

**WHERE DO YOU THINK IT WILL END?**

I really don't see it ending at all, and one of the things I regret is this whole culture of 5 star hotels, you know it is also linked to a lot of burgeoning restaurants, all manner of cuisine is now available, which is a very good thing, but, of course I am hardly an authority but I know people who travel abroad very frequently, and who is a big Thai,

Japanese cuisine freak, and he tells me most of the places in Bombay that sell for instance Thai or Chinese or Burmese food are so far removed from what you get in those places is not funny, and people..it is more a social thing, more a status thing to be seen in every new restaurant, to just go to all these places..

**SO YOU THINK MUMBAIKARS HAVE BECOME MUCH MORE STATUS CONSCIOUS.**

Absolutely. I see it happening all the time.

**DO YOU THINK IT IS TOUGHER FOR THE POORER OF THE CITY THAN IT USED TO BE?**

Yes, but even the poorer get sucked in to that dream, that possibility, I mean take the case of cell phones, it is frightening, every rickshaw taxi driver, most of my waiters probably have cell phones..I find it absurd. I always ask people what did you do ten years ago when there where no cell phones? How did you manage? It almost gives me the impression these people couldn't live then you know!

**DO YOU GET MANY YOUNG PEOPLE COMING IN HERE?**

Yeah. Now and then.

**COLLEGE KIDS?**

Sometimes, yeah.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ATTRACTS THEM TO THIS PLACE?**

I really don't know. It is cheap. Economical.

**WHAT ARE YOU CHARGING FOR A BOTTLE OF KINGFISHER?**

75

**AND THE GOVERNMENT'S TAKING 20% OF THAT?**

That's right.

**AND YOU HAD YOUR LITTLE PLAY I THINK YOU TOLD ME WITH PINBALL MACHINES,  
JUKEBOXES**

Yaar, back in the 80s.

**HINDI POP?**

Hindi and English pop. Elvis Pressley, the Beatles, the works.

### **AND IT WENT OKAY FOR A WHILE?**

Oh yeah. Quite successful.

### **WHY DID YOU REMOVE THEM?**

Again all kinds of licensing and problems crept up – you had to take all kinds of licenses and broadcasting payments and so forth. We got fed up. It was tiresome.

### **SO IN A SENTENCE, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE BRABOURNE RESTAURANT EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?**

More than for me I think it is a great institution. It has in its own way, and going back to the chaiwalla thing, you know one of the things I always feel, I am grateful for my father and his contribution, for contributing, if only as chaiwallas, to the city. It is amazing that they contributed in their own little way to the growth of this city, a city which has completely changed character. It really no longer exists as it once did.

### **SO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE IN A NEW BOMBAY NOW?**

In a way. Here is our oldest customer [gent walking in] – he gets two meals a day, has a roof over his head, he is happier than most people I know.

THANKS A LOT FOR YOUR TIME, RASHID.

Bruce, its been my pleasure.

**ENDS**

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