

KHICHDI CENTRAL

Gayatri Ganesh & Abu Bakr Shaikh



9:00 am | Another Monday Morning

Another day to escape from a busy office, exchange numerous 'hi-hellos' and 'what did you have for breakfast?' on pavement eateries and crowded *darshinis* - hopefully today there are free chairs available. Maybe today, the restaurant steps will not become tables, and maybe upturned benches can remain in their resting positions. Maybe today is, surprise - a Food Carnival! Or maybe it is a day when cows take over our public spaces. Maybe today, tarpaulin will not be the primary shelter, and maybe, just maybe, the request '*please swalpa extra haaki*' (please serve me some extra food) will not be needed to get a bigger helping.

'అన్న! గెరణ్ణు చాయ కుడి!'

No matter the language, what is expected of this call is still a piping hot cup of beverage that transports us - to a humble *dhaba* (Hindi term for roadside eatery) in a trip to the hills; the little bakery outside our college campus; the memory of '*ghar ka chai*' (homemade tea) from one's childhood; clinks of high tea with dainty little sandwiches in the pretty outdoor cafe - really anything but the loud and angry vehicle-dominated Monday morning roads.

Hop, skip, jump over loose, tangled wires and waterlogged monsoon roads. It is not too long until the cars and autos dwindle, and the road hits a foot-friendly 'Welcome aboard!' note. When you get there, what catches your attention is not the presence of seemingly identical Iyengar Bakeries or Juice Junctions, but giant hands that visibly control nearly everything on the street - the invisible hands (hidden economic forces as coined by Adam Smith) where internal streets allow for temporary appropriation as well as opportunities to stop, connect and carpe diem. A space that accommodates a 'I have a lot to say about current trends in the stock markets' as well as a 'dooradinda bandidvi, swalpa extra kodi sir' (we have come from afar, please give us a bit extra)!



Hosting a heady mix of sights, sounds and smells - a space of diverse voices, species and trades - a mixture, a *khichdi* of sorts - is one that makes a lasting impression. Smelling a Kolkata *kathi* roll while eating honeycake outside an Iyengar Bakery, sitting on a *katte* under a tree canopy drinking coffee at a *darshini*, salivating over a fellow customer's buttery *masala dosa* goodness; crossing a crowded vehicular road alongside cows and goats whilst holding onto a piping hot *shawarma* roll; hearing the whistles of pressure cookers

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and incessant chatter over vegetable puffs served on little squares of old question papers; passing neat arrays of Congress buns, *bajjis* and *holige*, the thoroughfare morphs into a *Thindi Beedi* that celebrates food everyday. Tarpaulin roofs, asbestos walls, wooden planks, and *thela* umbrellas. Stools, upturned buckets, drums, flag post bases, boxes - what is a chair for when really anything can be sat on?



Avenue Road, Bengaluru Pete (Source: Aliyeh Rizvi)