



CITY SCOPE

Charukesi Ramadurai in Mumbai

Chindian, anyone?

After it was first brought to India by immigrants to Calcutta, Chinese food in the country slowly turned into “Chindian”, with the addition of local spices and flavours. However, it is in Mumbai where Chindian food has come into its own.

At about 5pm every day, a specific kind of hunger seizes the city. Lunch is a distant memory and it’s too early to entertain thoughts of dinner. All roads then lead to the friendly neighbourhood *chaatwala* – vendors who ply the streets, selling fried, spicy snacks from handcarts. The only question here is: Indian or Chinese?

The Chinese dishes sound familiar – but there are a few surprises. Chow mein in its local vegetarian guise is anything but a simple stir-fry. Vegetables of all shapes and colours go into it, from green peas and carrots to paneer (cottage cheese). Then there’s the popular American-

Chinese chop suey. Gobi and chicken Manchurian is a Mumbai original: deep-fried cauliflower and chicken fritters dunked in various sauces.

The latest trend on the street, however, is the Sinification of Indian food. The simple South Indian *dosa* (a crepe made of rice batter) is now available as a Sichuan *dosa*, filled with stir-fried noodles. I’ve heard rumours about a chow mein samosa, triangular deep-fried pastries usually filled with spicy potato, but I haven’t been adventurous enough to verify this. And there’s a new best-seller.

Bhelpuri – a mixture of puffed rice, sweet and spicy chutney, and a sprinkling of coriander and raw onion – has also gone east. Create a base with fried or steamed noodles, throw in some shredded cabbage, green pepper and carrot, replace the raw onion with spring onion and splash some “Chinese sauces”

on top (soy, chilli or, usually, fiery red “Sichuan sauce”, which is uniquely Indian), sprinkle with a handful of fresh coriander and there you have it: Chinese *bhel*. This dish, born entirely from Mumbai innovation, is giving all other street snacks a run for their money.

Chinese *bhel* has firmly lodged itself in the minds – and

stomachs – of Mumbai residents. It is an optimal combination of all the flavours that satisfy the Indian palate, it is healthier than most other street snacks and it is the cheapest way to “eat Chinese”. Furthermore, it’s the city’s only street snack that has its own Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/Chinese-bhel/366848956960).



Chinese bhel.