

SALUTING THE SHE-ROES



To celebrate International Women's Day in March, **MARWAR** puts the spotlight on femme power. A salute to our she-roes—the extraordinary women who are braving the gender bias and setting new trends in the Indian work ecosystem.

2023 is the year of she-roes (she-heroes)—women heroes who are making an impact on the world with their extraordinary achievements. All over the globe, we see women breaking the cycle of gender inequality and emerging as leaders in their respective fields. According to research, the current global workforce participation rate for women is 47.7%. This International Women's Day, **MARWAR** brings you stories of inspiring women who have raised the bar for themselves. Come, let's celebrate the spirit of our she-roes.



SARITA BAZAZ

Founder—The Food Affairs

Sarita Bazaz has revolutionised the catering business landscape in India. Meet the first-ever Marwari woman in the catering food business.

Text  Rachna Viridi

Sarita Bazaz, living in Bhagalpur, a small district in Bihar, always dreamt of infusing life to the flavours and innovations in food and that led her to establish her food catering company 30 years back. “Reading expressions of people as they enjoy and relish food, and seeing them pleased, truly fulfilled me,” says Bazaz, the first-ever Marwari woman to have entered the catering industry which was largely male dominated back then.

In 1993, she launched her catering company Ruskriti (meaning culinary flavour), with premium clients, and catered throughout the world. The catering company later went on to become The Food Affairs, with specialisation in curating bespoke dining experiences. “I was never intrigued by the idea of starting my own business. I was more drawn towards the skill of cooking, for which I sought the right inspiration from my mother and sister. Seeing them cook convinced me that food was more about the art of creating flavours with compassion, and inspired me to be capable of preparing a complete meal by the age of 13,” she elaborates. Given her expertise in crafting food with magnificence and authenticity, Sarita Bazaz has become an ingrained name in the culinary industry today.

Challenging her comfort zone

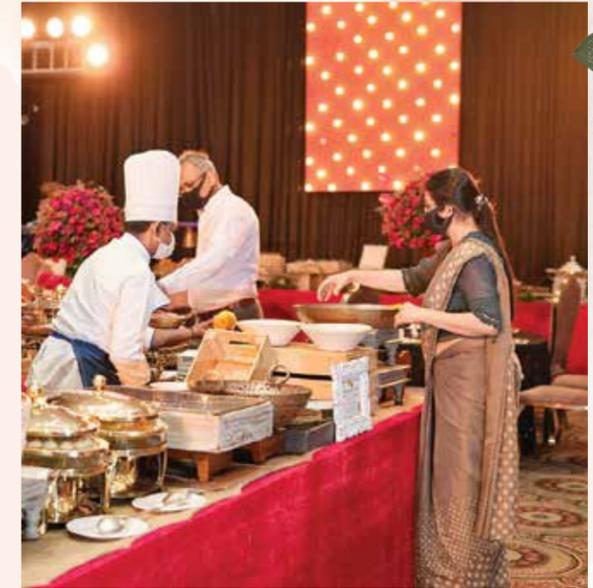
Growing up in a typical Marwari household in Bhagalpur, Bazaz was imbued with the belief of food being as fundamental as religion. “My conditioning resulted from the household’s daily activities in the house centred around food, and every chat was about the menu for the next supper. Thus, food became meaningful to me as a service rendered with the utmost kindness, respect and unconditionality,” she explains. To summarise, the Marwari culture not only incited the value for food in her but also, the hospitality with which it was offered, encouraged her to spread love by serving delectable delicacies.

Native Marwari expressions like ‘Manohar’ and ‘Aagraha’ which denote respect in serving meals, were the impetus behind Marwari cuisine and no guesses here, they also laid the groundwork for becoming the core of The Food Affairs. Having moved to Delhi three decades ago, she observed that the vegetarian food palate presented there was very basic. Seeing the limited varieties being repeated with no variation in flavour, she embarked on her first endeavour, made from her home kitchen after being pushed by her family. With her home kitchen as the starting point, Bazaz seamlessly ascended the ladder to corporate parties and small-scale events. Known for the authenticity of Indian *chaats*, The Food Affairs ensures retaining the local authentic flavour, while giving a unique way of presentation. She gradually progressed in her business by treating her clients like family and growing bigger and stronger by the year.

A delight for the palate

With Indian food and speciality *chaats* from Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata being her personal favourite, Bazaz’s passion for food is evident in every dish prepared and seasoned perfectly using the season’s freshest produce, sourced locally. “I live to eat and feed”—is her food mantra or, more accurately, a life mantra that she proudly proclaims. Coming from a household with a backyard full of fresh homegrown and organic ingredients kept her ‘ingredient conscious’, helping her choose the best ingredients while providing her service.

Known for her expertise in international cuisine, fusion foods and experimental recipes, the food expert emphasises that food is a personalised craft for her and despite changing times and the growth of new ideas, what persists in her cuisine is its authenticity and essence



of ingredients. From paying attention to the smallest of details—including sourcing the right product to reinventing and recreating recipes to suit different palates—her perfection is invincible. Her persistence and passion helped her revolutionise the catering industry.

Woman’s the way

In her 30-year journey, Bazaz’s catering company has spread their love through food and served an impressive range of clientele including Indian restaurants and hotels in places like Abu Dhabi, Phuket, Bangkok, Hua Hin, Spain, Turkey and Bali. Having travelled to different countries and met new people, she has discovered new ingredients and learned new cooking skills—all of which inspired her to curate new recipes.

Women are breaking societal taboos and creating possibilities for themselves. Bazaz is one such woman entrepreneur who, despite varied opinions, uncertain expressions, and squandered opportunities owing to a woman single-handedly managing business, earned the recognition of being the first woman entrepreneur in the catering industry. “I embrace the pleasure of working in the food sector. It gives me an opportunity for endless learning in settings as huge as cities and as modest as neighbourhoods,” she states. *