

Dubai authors bite into a niche market

DUBAI **Bindu Suresh Rai**

Flip through the pages of UAE history and only a handful would recognise that the Thathai Bhatias were among the first settlers to migrate to the land earlier known simply as the Trucial Sheikhdoms nearly three centuries ago.

For Dubai-based authors and entrepreneurs, Bharat and Deepa Chachara, this oversight merely highlighted an erosion of a small Indian community that was fast losing its identity to the bright lights of the 21st century.

Keeping this in mind, the husband-wife duo launched *Panja Khada* (translating into Our Food) in 2002, a cook book that traced the history of traditional Thathai Bhatia



Deepa Chachara; Sanjay Verma, Indian Consul General; and Bharat Chachara at the launch of Panjakhada.com website in Dubai XAVIER WILSON

cuisine, recording each ingredient that would one day allow future generations to savour their roots – vegetarian cuisine that refrains from using onion or garlic.

“Panjakhada.com is an extension of that community project, borne from an essential need to retain our culture

and our traditions,” said Bharat Chachara. “We hope this momentum will go a long way to sustain our history.”

The website, launched on Monday, recorded 500 hits within 24 hours of going live, while the book has sold 1,500-odd till date and is on the local bestseller list, said

Chachara. “What we learned in these past eight years was that the book served up to a limited audience and we needed to throw open the doors to a much wider base; a complementary website serves that purpose,” he said. “Plus, Panjakhada.com will not just cater to Bhatias alone, but to anyone who is passionate about traditional Indian cooking.”

The Chahcharas are now working on their next book, *Reeti Rivaj* (Traditions), which traces the history of the community. “The book is again borne out of the realisation that not much was being done to maintain our culture and traditions. We need to go beyond our regular celebrations of Diwali and Holi and target the niche communities,” he said.

WHO ARE THE THATHAI BHATIAS

Thathai Bhatia roots can be traced back to the Bhatti clan from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, nearly 500 years ago. Driven out by invaders, the community spread out across undivided India. The Bhattis who

migrated to Thatta, a city in the Sindh province of Pakistan, were known as Thathai Bhatias. Post-partition in 1947, most Thathai Bhatias shifted base back to India and the Middle East.

