

Nine Decades of *Nirula's*: Nation, City, Class

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ABSTRACT

The public restaurant is an important site for exploring a national society's tryst with modernity. In the nine decades of its run in Delhi, the national capital of India, the trajectory of *Nirula's* is inter-woven with the subcontinent's history and political economy; it bears the imprint of a developmental state and society. Its expansion and diversification into types of eating establishments, reflect the social character of the city, and the changing profiles of consumers in post-independence India.

This article analyzes the historical trajectory of *Nirula's*, an iconic food company founded in Delhi in 1934. I argue that the career trajectory of *Nirula's* is inexplicable without reference to the connection between the changing circumstances of production in a national and global field, the character and culture of Delhi, the national capital, and the attitudes and desires of consumers in context of the formation the middle class in India. The explanation alludes to three registers: nation, city, and class.

Keywords: Nirula's, Restaurant, India, New Delhi, Middle Class,

INTRODUCTION

The restaurant is a modern social institution; it entails public dining and commercial transactions. Though a comprehensive history of food consumption outside the domestic framework is work in progress, traditional non-domestic commensality—an established historical fact in the public life of India—was confined to religious and royal milieus, where traditional social or religious boundaries could be maintained even in public eating places.¹ Under the dominion of tradition, the domestic hearth is a custodian of orthodox culinary and *jati* commensal rules; commercial dealings and food transactions are insulated from each other because in the Hindu scheme of life, food is central to the links between men and gods.²

The norms of social life discourage public dining, because the practice of dining out does not find a congenial niche within the traditional values of Hindu orthodoxy. The Brahminical anxiety about purity, mandates that food should be eaten privately—screened from public view—because consumption of food in a public place would expose the diner to evil influences. Historically, in the subcontinent, only travelers—merchants and pilgrims—encountered the problem of obtaining food prepared outside the domestic hearth. The Mughal period saw a limited facility for public dining by travelers with the institution of the caravansera. In the cities, cookshops and 'public bakeries' flourished if the cities prospered. But, by and large, Indian travelers had to rely upon kinship connections for hospitality. These facts pertaining to traditional India, are echoed in a historical survey of restaurants in context of the history of public dining in Bombay.³

A restaurant represents a total refutation of tradition and the entire rules it inculcates at the level of the domestic hearth.⁴ Restaurants are sites where the contestation between tradition and modernity is played out. Public eating places in modern India still seek to maintain boundaries among castes, regions and food

¹ See Appadurai 1988: 9.

² See Khare 1976:246.

³ See Conlon's (1996) study of 'public culture' in India in relation to the history of restaurants and public dining in Mumbai (erstwhile Bombay).

⁴ See Khare op.cit.

preferences;⁵ all the same, restaurants—both humble and pretentious—have increasingly become arenas for the transcendence of ethnic difference and for the exploration of the culinary ‘other.’⁶

Besides such contestations, restaurants reify an emerging culinary cosmopolitanism related to the cultural rise of the new middle classes. Restaurants reflect, permit, and promote the introduction of a wide variety of changes in modern Indian life, including modifications of urban budgets and work schedules, entry of women into the middle-class workforce, new patterns of sociability, and growth of new ways to enjoy wealth through conspicuous consumption.⁷ The public restaurant, thus, is an important site for understanding a society’s tryst with modernity.

This article analyzes the historical trajectory of *Nirula’s*, an iconic food company founded in Delhi in 1934. I argue that the career trajectory of *Nirula’s* is inexplicable without reference to the connection between the changing circumstances of production in a national and global field, the character and culture of Delhi—the national capital city of India—and the attitudes and desires of consumers in context of the formation the middle class in India. The explanation alludes to three registers: nation, city and class.

In the nine decades of its run, the trajectory of *Nirula’s* forms an integral part of the subcontinent’s history and political economy; it bears the imprint of a developmental state and national society. Its expansion, diversification with respect to menu, and types of eating establishments, reflect the social character of the city, and the changing profiles of consumers.

This article aims to map the historical trajectory of *Nirula’s* based on the following sources of information and data: 1). interviews with Mr. Lalit Narula (co-founder of *Nirula’s*), Manager Operations, *Nirula’s*, and respondents in the grandparental generation; 2). *Nirula’s* website content; 3) interviews with hospitality industry personnel.

Section 1 discusses the founding of *Nirula’s* at a historical juncture traversing India’s pre-and post-independence phase; *section 2* examines the embedding of *Nirula’s* in the national capital from 1950 through 1970; *section 3* discusses *Nirula’s* foray into food- processing and diversification; *section 4* focuses on *Nirula’s* marketing strategy in the face of competition from multinational food chains; the *conclusion* highlights the changing profiles of the consumer in the career of *Nirula’s* on the three interconnected registers of nation, city and class.

Nirula’s: Beginnings and Arrival (1934-1950)⁸

The two founders of *Nirula’s*—the brothers L.C. Narula and M.G. Narula—originally from West Punjab, now in Pakistan migrated to Delhi in 1928. Originally, hailing from a family of medical professionals, the Narula brothers finally found their feet as entrepreneurs and businessmen in the Hotel and Food Service Industry after brief forays into ventures such as pharmacy, optical shop and a photo studio.

In 1934—*Hotel India*—their first venture materialized in the heart of New Delhi’s erstwhile Connaught Place.⁹ *Hotel India* offered a twelve-room accommodation and a restaurant-bar. In 1940, *Hotel India* diversified by

⁵ For the issue of the persistence of caste in context of public dining see Iverson and Raghavendra (2006).

⁶ Restaurants and public eating establishments are sites for observing the dialectic of regional and national logics play out (see Appadurai op.cit.).

⁷ See Conlon op.cit.: 90-1.

⁸ This sketch of the historical trajectory of *Nirula’s* owes to Mr. Lalit Narula’s (co-founder of *Nirula’s* along with Deepak Narula) patience with my interview questions and his generosity in sharing with me a draft of the content prepared for the *Nirula’s* website under construction at that point in 2003. I thank Mr. Lalit Narula for his hospitality, time, enthusiasm, and patience.

The secondary sources I used are:

Ahuja (2002), Ali (2003), Arora and Neera Bhardwaj (2001), Bhatnagar (2003), Bhushan (2002), Chand (2002), Chandwada (2002), Chawla (2003), Gupta (2002), ITCOT. 2002, Khandelwal (2002), Koul (2002a), (2002b), (2002c), Kumar (2002), Press Coverage (2002a), (2002b), (2003), Sawhney (2002), Sharma (2002), Srivastava (2002), Team Viva (2003), Thukral (2002), Tikoo (2002) and Vishal (2002).

⁹ a. Connaught Place is a business district constructed by the British. It was the financial and commercial hub of the capital city of Delhi, designed to serve the needs of the British Administration and the city’s elite specially those residing in Lutyen’s Bungalow Zone. Its circular layout—inner and outer circles—design is in the Georgian style, inspired by the Royal Crescent in Bath, England.

opening a restaurant serving an Indian menu; it also introduced ballroom dancing and cabaret. The customer base of *Hotel India* was primarily all male: American soldiers, state functionaries, tourists, and businessmen. By 1947, the soldier ceased to be the primary customer; the fluctuations in business depended on the evening's performer. This necessitated the switch over, in 1950, to *Brasserie*, a self-service restaurant with a limited Indian and continental menu serving beer and liquor. After the opening of *Hotel India*, in the same year, in collaboration with the Coffee Board, the Narula brothers started the *Indian Coffee Shop* in Janpath.

Nirula's and New Nation: 1950-70

A hard earned and newly acquired nationhood was the context of *Nirula's* run from 1950 to 1970. Post-independence, India embarked on the path of modernization and internationalization. Urbanization, industrialization and planned cities were a hallmark of the new nation. Business and commerce gave an impetus to leisure facilities, recreational centres, hotels and restaurants.¹⁰

Under the Nehruvian vision of nation-building, five year plans were prepared. High profile projects—Bhakra-Nangal Dam, Bhilai Steel Plant, Hirakud Dam, Rourkela Steel Plant, Sindri Fertilizers—attracted professionals, semi-professionals, labourers and workers from different parts of India. Likewise, the temples, mosques, churches, gurudwaras and holy shrines were a big draw for pilgrims from diverse faiths and communities. These movements of Indians from their place of birth and education to new townships—each of which was a mini-India—exposed people to a variety of tastes.¹¹

Delhi being the seat of the national government, the legislative, judicial and executive functions of the state, the bureaucracy, and several public sector undertakings, absorbed educated Indians of all hues in the projects of the nation state. It also attracted those who would be at the base of a hierarchy with the class of educated Indians—the middle class—at the top. This sort of a mixing of Indians in the capital city of Delhi, and the rise of the educated middle class is a vital element in the circumstance of the *Nirula's* growth trajectory.

In the decade of the 1950s, as the customer base of public eating establishments gradually changed from male customers to the middle class, *Brasserie* was succeeded by a modern self-help cafeteria serving a variety. This phase marked a perceptible shift towards the *family-style restaurant*¹² i.e. restaurants not exclusively for men; they were deemed suitable for and welcoming of women and children as well. A family restaurant implied a 'respectable' place.¹³

The family restaurant went hand in hand with a 'variety' menu; this reflected the 'tastes of Delhiites'; plus, it gave Delhiites their first taste of pizzas and burgers. In 1950, the *Chinese Room* was set up by the Narulas, making them the first Indians of non-Chinese origin to set up a Chinese restaurant. This was made possible by the circumstance of the would be first chef of this restaurant, Li Wo Po, who had accompanied Chiang Kai Shekh¹⁴ on his visit to India and decided to stay back.

Between 1958 and 1960 *Nirula's* launched three ventures: the first in 1958 was the *Nirula's Hotel*; it counted among one of the first modern 3-star hotels in India with central air conditioning; the second in 1960 was *La*

See <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/etimes/trending/who-built-delhis-connaught-place-lesser-known-facts-you-need-to-know/photostory/109642976.cms?picid=109642988>

b. For a comprehensive history of Connaught Place, see Liddle 2018.

¹⁰ For instance, the Ashok Hotel in Delhi was built under the supervision of Nehru in 1956 for hosting UNESCO's ninth convention. See Bhatia 2022.

¹¹ See Pant 2013:23

¹² For an analysis of the relation between middle class and family-style restaurant with reference to *McDonald's* restaurants in India, see Bhatia 2024.

¹³ Likewise, the Irani Cafes—a social resort for Bombay's male population—gradually enabled the women to participate in dining out as a custom of family enjoyment. These cafes incorporated 'family cabins'—wooden and translucent-glass partitioned areas where genteel, respectable groups could dine without being exposed to public gaze. The availability of unexposed dining areas allowed entire family groups, including women, to partake of a meal, or at least tea and snacks (Conlon 1996:100)

¹⁴ Chiang Kai Shekh was a soldier and statesman. He was Head of the Nationalist Government in China from 1928-1949; and subsequently Head of the Chinese Nationalist Government in Exile in Taiwan (1950-75). See <https://www.britannica.com/place/Taiwan>.

Boheme— a modern restaurant with a unique décor specializing in Hungarian cuisine; in the same year, the third, *Gufa*, a popular Indian restaurant of its time with Indian style seating and an all-silver *thali* service in a dim lit romantic atmosphere. This was the first deluxe Indian food specialty restaurant in India.

The trajectory of *Nirula's* in this phase serves as an apt context for analyzing the formation of the urban middle class around new forms of leisure; and amidst intimations of dining out as a family practice.

Food Processing, Variety Menu, Whole Family: 1970-1990

Nirula's food metamorphosed into fast food, consequent to its forays into food processing in the 1970s under the stewardship of brothers Lalit and Deepak Narula. This new regime of production is based on standardization, manufacture, taste identification and capping costs for high turnover. To this end, operations were moved to and concentrated in self-owned production centres with centralized kitchens that catered to all *Nirula's* outlets in Delhi. The imported equipment used in the production centres entailed heavy capital expenditure; this held back the company from expanding outside Delhi. According to a company official,¹⁵ *Nirula's* edge has been its own production centres. Food production and processing are done in-house; its dairy plant takes care of the ice-cream and cheese; breads, cookies and savories are produced at the *Nirula's* bakery. Other products manufactured in *Nirula's* own production units are sauces, syrups, ketchup, jams and mustard sauce.

Nirula's launched the first modern fast food restaurant chain in the early 1970's followed by *The Pastry Shop* and *Snack Bar* in 1972 and the *Hot Shoppe* in 1977. With this, *Nirula's* entered the quick service food business. The *Ice Cream Parlor*—first of its kind in India—opened in 1978; *Potpourri* restaurant with the first salad bar in India and the *Pegasus Bar* followed in 1979.

Nirula's marketing philosophy and business strategy was guided by the cultural conception that 'standardization works up to a point in the Indian situation'. Mechanized food production made it possible for *Nirula's* to diversify its menu; introduce variety comprising Continental, Indian, Mughlai, and South Indian cuisines and fast foods: pizzas and burgers adapted to the 'Indian' situation. Thus, *Nirula's* indigenized the McDonaldized conception of standardization¹⁶ by adding a variety of eighty items to the menu.

If the customer base of *Nirula's* in the 1950-70 phase was the middle class, in the 1970-90 phase it was the family—the intimation of which was evident in the 50-70s phase. The 70s' thrust on *food processing* coupled with a precedence of *variety* over standardization, firmed up as a ground for hailing the *whole family* as the emblematic customer base of *Nirula's fun foods*.

Nirula's took immense pride in serving a variety menu; it had succeeded in having its finger on the pulse of Delhi's tastebuds. By spreading the net of variety far and wide, the company had seduced the palates of Delhiites. *Nirula's* gave Delhiites a taste of variety in a double sense: one, a variety menu; two, the desire for variety. The introduction of American burgers and Italian pizzas ushered in a culinary cosmopolitanism in *Nirula's* family-style restaurants.

Delhiites embraced variety¹⁷ enthusiastically; the appeal of culinary cosmopolitanism has a lot to do with the increasing social heterogeneity of the capital city. In this context, variety is imbricated with the idea of the family which is reflected in the ad line of *Nirula's*: *Fun foods for the whole family*. The *fun family* is a *whole family*; it comprises ages ranging between 6-66 years. Though the *fun family* of *Nirula's* is not represented in the images of print or visual advertisements, contrary to the images of the *McDonald's family* in television advertisements,¹⁸ it approximates to the three generational extended family.

¹⁵ J. S. Grover, Vice-President, *Nirula's* in an interview to Business Line's Catalyst, March 22, 2001.

¹⁶ See McDonaldization thesis in Ritzer 2000.

¹⁷ A 'variety' menu enjoys the status of a normative template; it is incorporated as an imperative into home meals, domestic hospitality, wedding dinners and social gatherings.

¹⁸ This is unlike the McDonald's conception of family projected in its television advertisements. See Bhatia 2024.

It is not surprising that most of the urban grandparents of today, in their recall of their days, describe Nirula's as a place their families descended upon in a carload late in the evenings.¹⁹ If Nirula's enjoyed an un-surpassed popularity in 'their days', it has become the stuff of nostalgia today. Nirula's is memorialized as a go-to place for lunches, dinners, ice-creams and pizzas, especially over the weekends; or after catching a late movie in Regal Cinema:²⁰

Time was when everybody who was anybody, either visiting the national capital or was part of it, had 'done' Nirula's. The original fast food joint, Nirula's had to its credit not only the tag of the restaurant that virtually brought fast food to Delhi, but also one that played host to various courtships, sneaky dinner dates, birthday bashes and family outings at a time when disposable incomes were not what they are today, attitudes were more conservatively inclined, and the concept of Generation Next did not quite exist. Those were the 1980s and the early 1990s. Those were also the days when the McDonald's, Pizza Huts, Pizza Corners and Domino's did not exist on the Indian landscape.

The trajectory of Nirula's has been one of expansion and diversification into Business Hotels, Waiter Service Restaurants, Family Style Restaurants, Ice-Cream Parlors, Pastry Shops and Food Processing Plants. Nirula's first outlet outside Connaught Place opened in Vasant Vihar, followed by another one in Chanakypuri in 1981. The Defence Colony branch and the *Chinese Room Bar* opened in 1986; a restaurant in NOIDA started operations in 1987; it modified into a hotel by March 1991.

An altered perception of the consumer in the decade of the nineties in context of the liberalization of the economy, boosted the expansion drive towards Family Style Restaurants, Delivery Outlets, Home Delivery Outlets and Express restaurants.

As per the management, the consumer was shaped by the prevailing socio-economic conditions in which small and middle scale industries came of age. This development marked the processing of foods, opening of imports; an improvement in the quality and variety of Indian products, boost in sales in the refrigerator market, especially in the marketing of two door refrigerators. Urban agglomerations grew: the population of Delhi and Bombay crossed the 10 million mark; foreign travel came of age; computerization became the norm; foreign companies and restaurant chains entered some segments of the service sector; *TGIF, Dominos, McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Wimpy's, KFC, Baskin Robbins* came to India in the mid 90's; the service sector registered a substantial growth in segments such as computer software and courier service. The white-collar industrial class with substantial disposable income expanded. This phase saw the beginning of the larger share of disposable incomes move into in hands of people in their 20's and 30's. More and more women started working; full time domestic staff came by with difficulty; it was affordable only to the upper middle-and upper-income levels. The satellite TV network purveying 'new' styles of living brought the urban areas under its umbrella. However, the value for money requirement continued to hold sway over the minds of consumers.

In the corresponding scenario of the F&B (Food and Beverages) industry, the acute competition in the food and service industry drove hotels to limit the number of in-house restaurants; they resorted to taking franchises of chain restaurants. Restaurants came to be incorporated into social practices as infrastructure, luxury and entertainment areas. Eating out was well established by now due to its functional necessity for those who travelled long distances, for the households of women in salaried employment. Besides, the paucity of home staff or shortage of skilled staff added to the growing utility of restaurants. Children's growing preference for ordering-in or dining out at a restaurant on returning from or on the way back from school, proved to be a big driver of boosting the value of restaurants.

Expansion, Ambience, Indulging Children, Wooing Youth: Post 1990s

Prior to players like McDonald's, Pizza Hut and Dominoes, Nirula's was the most popular and sought-after western style fast food chain in Delhi. Nineteen ninety onwards, Nirula's had to face stiff competition from

¹⁹ This fact was revealed to me in my conversations with several of those Nirula's lovers, who are grandparents now.

²⁰ Regal Cinema is a legendary theatre situated in Connaught Place. It started operations in 1932; the curtains were brought down on Regal in 2017. See Rajput: 2017.

multinational corporations with huge investment budgets.²¹ In real terms, the *McDonald's* challenge to *Nirula's* was an investment budget to the tune of \$40 million (Rs. 124 crore), its aim to set up 100 outlets in the first seven years, advance systems, prioritize human resource development, marketing and acquiring property.²²

The management responded by expansion plans, setting an ambitious target of opening 40 outlets by the year 2003. This included a north Indian expansion into Chandigarh, Jalandhar and Ludhiana;²³ and then, going national.²⁴ Catching up with the trend, following the opening of *McDonald's* restaurant on the Delhi-Mathura Highway in association with a Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) petrol station, *Nirula's* inaugurated its first highway hotel on the Delhi-Chandigarh highway, primarily for the corporate travelers. The trend of highway restaurants reflected the coming to age of domestic tourism in the road transport and highways sector of a liberalized economy.

Some changes were noticeable even before the expansion drive took off. These are sound indicators of the company's perception of its customers. *Nirula's* evolved a strategy of congregating the entire family in a restaurant by targeting children. Towards this end, Santa Claus made appearances in outlets to distribute sweets to children; children under 13 years having membership of the *Nirula's Birthday Club* received birthday cards and free ice-cream scoops. Coinciding with the school annual exams, in the month of April, *Nirula's* instituted the *Scholars Award*. A *McDonald's* style Happy Meal—*fun meal*—with puzzles and toys was introduced on the menu. *Nirula's* celebrated the Valentines spirit with the romantic treat of a free offer of two heart-shaped pastries with every purchase of a heart-shaped pizza. Besides this, there were special heart-shaped chocolates with a nuts and truffle centre.

A modern netizen friendly cyber bar, the *Byte Cyber Bar*—with multiple Internet terminal posts and a well stocked bar serving premium, liquors, wines, beers and cocktails—was added to one of *Nirula's* bigger Delhi outlets. This cyber bar came with vibrant interiors, snacky food and beverage concoctions, and a handful of Personal Computers.

In August 1997, *Nirula's* launched B2C (business to consumer) services. It entered E-marketing. An interactive website was designed to take on-line orders, hotel reservation and bookings, and collaboration-interest enquiries. The online service was made available primarily to people living outside Delhi for ordering cakes and ice-cream tubs for their friends and relatives living in and around Delhi. Subsequently, it was opened for overseas patrons. In fact, most of the orders placed on the website are from non-resident Indians (NRIs).

Nirula's also launched *21's Café* in the format of 'sophisticated' stand-alone ice-cream parlors. The brand name *21's* is after a popular flavor on the *Nirula's* ice-cream menu. The *21's Café* is primarily targeted at consumers in the age-group of 8-35 years. *21's* is also customized to accommodate the urban middle-class family, students and people on the move. A single café has a seating capacity of 15-20 people. In addition to ice-creams and frozen desserts, the *21's* serve beverages—coffee and tea—besides ready-to-pick up food items such as sandwiches and buns. The *21's* is the *Nirula's* way of 'moving with the times' as reflected in an image make-over of the café's interiors: contemporary design and décor. The look and feel of these outlets²⁵ are youthful, bathed in shades of red; the wallpaper is embossed with the silhouettes of svelte girls and boys. In

²¹ The challenge posed by multinational corporations to *Nirula's* finds a mention in Amin 2000/2001: 237.

²² According to a report in *Fortune*, *McDonald's* is more of a landlord than a conventional fast-food chain. The real estate set-up drove *McDonald's* to chase profits by locating, building, and opening more stores than anyone else in the business imagined possible. See David, 2003: 42.

²³ *Nirula's* business policy is to manage or own units; not franchising. * The contract with owners is that the unit runs under the brand umbrella of *Nirula's*; and that it is managed by *Nirula's*. The supply of retail goods is sourced from the in-house food processing units. The same goes for the food ingredients sourced from the central kitchen comprising bulk kitchen, fruit section, bakery and ice-cream sections. *Nirula's* quality assurance department monitors and tests ingredients for the manufacture of food items. As part of the deal, *Nirula's* provides Human Resources consultancy and training.

*The franchising model of business was expected to breathe life into the Indian hospitality industry, says a report on the proceedings of a seminar at the *Express Hotelier and Caterer*. See D'Mello, 2003.

²⁴ See Kothari, 2004.

²⁵ Here I am referring to the *21's* outlet in the Sector 18 market in NOIDA (in the National Capital Region).

May 2003, *Nirula's* opened a family-style restaurant on the University of Delhi Campus. The catchment area of this restaurant was primarily university students.

The customers' expectations of a pleasing ambience and a memorable eating experience was not lost on *Nirula's*; it recognized that consumer awareness had increased vastly. In response to this, *Nirula's* redesigned its Family Style Restaurants after a contemporary vibe: the Gurugram (erstwhile Gurgaon) restaurant that started operations in mid-2002 is a case in point.²⁶ This restaurant is strategically positioned as an up-market outlet catering to the corporate clients at Ansals Sushant Plaza (a premium housing hub). This restaurant has a dedicated kiddie's corner with slides for kids and a pastry shop. This is the first *Nirula's* restaurant where artworks from *Art Today's* Neemrana collection are on display.

While the chain's restricted presence does not warrant advertising on the electronic media, most of the visibility-generation is done through promotional communication. The promotional campaigns offer freebies: air tickets from/to Delhi-Bangkok-Delhi by Thai Airways, a trip for two to the Kuala Lumpur Formula 1 race, Moulinex white goods, Godrej refrigerators, Blue Star ACs, Thomson web Fones, Wagon-R car and Quantum PCs.

CONCLUSION

The historical trajectory of *Nirula's* serving *Fun Foods for the Whole Family* lends itself to delineating the changing profiles of the consumers.

Until 1940s, *Nirula's* catered to *male* clients. The 1950s recorded a shift towards family restaurants for *middle class* patrons who desired a fine dining experience at the Chinese, Hungarian and Indian restaurants in *Hotel Nirula's* Connaught Place. Nineteen seventies inaugurated an era of the *whole family*; its taste was cosmopolitan, and it relished variety.

The onset of the 1990s saw *Nirula's*' giving into customers' expectations regarding restaurant ambience, décor, hygiene and youthful service. These expectations are created by multinational corporations with gargantuan budgets for manufacturing 'experience' into a product. This created the 'discerning and discriminating' consumers with a global outlook. The *Nirula's* customer, since the 1990s is a global Indian—the New Middle Class²⁷ consumer—not just a Delhiite.

Post the 1990s, while the whole family continues to be the emblematic customer base of *Nirula's*, new consumer profiles are noticeable: *school children*, *university students*, *net-savvy youth*, *corporate travelers*, *NRIs*, a carload of *tourists* motoring on the highway, *couples* imbued with the Valentine's spirit, those on a holiday in Kuala Lumpur, users air conditioners, refrigerators, PCs, web-phones, and those who are seduced by ambience and image.²⁸

The *Nirula's* story, so far, brings to light the historical significance of Delhi, the shifting sands of taste, and formation of the middle class—three lines of thought about India's tryst with modernity.

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²⁶ Gurugram is the platform for new product launches for *McDonald's* too. New taste menus are initiated here. According to company sources, a test launch in Gurgaon, could lead to a 15-35% jump in sales without advertising.

²⁷ For critical analyses of the 'consumer' definition of the NMC, see Deshpande 2004 and Fernandes 2006.

²⁸ In 2006, *Nirula's* was bought over by Malaysian Navis Capital. In 2018, PE funded Banyan Tree Growth Capital bought *Nirula's*. See Lad and Alves 2022. Today *Nirulas's* is present across more than 150 locations in Delhi/NCR, Chandigarh, Dehradun, Lucknow. See <https://nirulas.com/our-legacy>.

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