

## Taj Mahal, New Delhi empowers visually impaired women

The hotel announced the launch of Blind Bakes Cafe, an initiative aimed at empowering visually impaired women, in association with NAB India Centre for Blind Women & Disability Studies.

by [Staff Writer](#) February 5, 2024

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Chef Arun Sundararaj, Director of Culinary Operations, Taj Mahal, New Delhi; Binu Nair, Area Human Resources Director - North Hotels & Director of Human Resources, Taj Mahal, New Delhi; Shalini Khanna Sodhi, Founder Director NAB India Centre for Blind Women and Disability Studies, with the women employees of Blind Bakes Café

[Taj Mahal, New Delhi](#) announced the launch of Blind Bakes Cafe, an initiative aimed at empowering visually impaired women, in association with NAB India Centre for Blind Women & Disability Studies. The initiative represents a significant step towards inclusive hospitality and reinforces Taj Mahal, New Delhi's commitment to social responsibility.

Speaking on the launch, Satyajeeet Krishnan, Area Director – Operations and General Manager, Taj Mahal, New Delhi, said, “Our longstanding partnership with NAB takes on a new dimension today. With the launch of this Cafe, we remain steadfast in our commitment towards equality, inclusion and sustaining livelihoods. While we provide culinary and housekeeping skills to members of NAB, we are privileged to savour the delightful creations crafted by their team in our associate dining room.”

Shalini Khanna Sodhi, Founder Director, NAB India Centre for Blind Women and Disability Studies, said, “Blind Bake is an unparalleled story of diversity and inclusion. Blind chefs have shown us that nothing is impossible. An amazing initiative of Taj Mahal, New Delhi to empower the training enterprise by visually impaired women to invite Blind Bake in their staff cafeteria.”

The initiative is inspired by IHCL’s core values and the profound words of Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, Founder, Tata Group, “In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder in business, but is in fact the very purpose of its existence.” Through this initiative, Taj Mahal, New Delhi, strives to create meaningful opportunities for the visually impaired community, aligning seamlessly with the ethos of Paathya, the sustainability and social impact framework by IHCL.

## Blind Bake: Blind women bake recipe for inclusivity | Delhi News



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DELHI: Maya cannot see, but her hands move with ease – to peel, cut and stir the tomatoes in sizzling hot oil – under the guidance of a renowned chef, who takes her slowly through the process. Sometimes, he uses the number count for precision and, at others, urges her and other women listening to his instructions to follow the smell of ingredients and feel the texture with their hands. Soon, an appetising pasta sauce is ready for everyone to savour.

This may appear like a scene from a professional cooking class, but it is much, much more. This is a story of inclusion that is taking shape at one of Delhi's top five-star hotels, as "Blind Bake" – cafe led by blind women, as the name suggests – makes its presence felt among the associates working there across hospitality functions.

'Blind Bake' started as a first-of-its-kind simulation cafe in 2021 in the picturesque lawns of NAB India – Centre for Blind Women and Disability Studies, in Hauz Khas Enclave. Starting on a small scale, the cafe formalised its operations in mid-2022 and has been catering to a steady trail of visitors, including people from the neighbourhood and college students.

NAB Centre's founder and director, Shalini Khanna Sodhi, says the cafe now has a broader vision. "Our first outlet outside of our premises at a five-star hotel is our way to send out a strong message that those without vision too can cook, bake and run restaurants with some hand holding. We have faced so much resistance from

employers in the past, especially in the hospitality sector. I hope that will start changing now,” she said.

“At NAB Centre, all girls are trained in basic cooking as a life-survival skill. Our equipment is accessible with braille. So far, around 4,000 girls trained in various courses have learnt basic cooking. The six girls associated as a dedicated team with our cafe and the new outlet earn anywhere between Rs 15,000 and Rs 18,000 a month,” she added.

The outlet of ‘Blind Bake’ that opened at the hotel in January is based in a plush ‘associate dining area’ that caters to around 600 employees of all ranks. When TOI visited the cafe at the hotel, a vibrant menu of baked goodies, burgers, bread rolls and more to go with a hot cup of coffee welcomes you. A trainer in basic cooking, Maya Thakuri shares her sense of pride to see the girls steering the cafe. She hails from a small village in Nepal and had never gone to school till she came to Delhi as a teenager. “I learnt everything here at NAB Centre, starting from ABCD, at the age of 16,” she said. Now 30 and a graduate, Maya is a trainer in basic cooking as a life-skill programme at NAB Centre.

Arun Sundararaj, director of culinary operations at the hotel, who has been supporting the girls with skill building, shared that when he was invited some years ago to NAB Centre to do some special sessions for the women in cooking, it was a new kind of learning experience even for him. “Initially, I wondered that since sight is so critical to the nuances of cooking, how would this work and, then, I came back home and tried to cook with my eyes closed. This was when I realised the power of smell and touch in the culinary experience. I also saw that the non-sighted are so much more sensitive to touch and texture, as that is what guides them in their daily life. This understanding marked a beginning and, since then, there has been no looking back,” Sundararaj told TOI.

“Later, when ‘Blind Bake’ came up at NAB Centre, I was happy to see the quality of the products made by the women and we thought of associating with the cafe for our staff-dining area as we did not have one since an outlet that existed was closed during the Covid pandemic for safety reasons,” he said.

To add to the skill-set of the women running the cafe at the hotel, Sundararaj will also be holding some special sessions to give them exposure on how a professional kitchen works on a large scale.

At one such session, among the women at the counter in the kitchen, stirring, cutting and attentively listening to Sundararaj, one saw Tara follow each step meticulously. She lost her father earlier last month, but chose to return to work as she now has more financial responsibilities than before. Her father worked as a potter in Kanpur. Tara is 30 and has just 20% vision. She came to NAB Centre in 2021 to pursue a customer-care executive course, but developed a keen interest in cooking and baking. Today, she is part of the ‘Blind Bake’ lead team. While she

takes orders for burgers, noodles and more, she shyly shares her dream – “I hope I can be so accomplished that one day I can open my own cafe.”

aimed that over 1,000 trees which would be cut for the project. In an affidavit last week, the district had told NCT that the area was not a forest, but it may be a degraded forest, the density of trees.

The respondent (RLDA) has said that DDA had handed over the possession of 10.07 hectares to the applicant also pointed out the plea of the applicant that there are 1,000 trees at the subject site, he submitted that an encroaching

"Hence, we are not sure that the respondents have genuinely been taken to prevent illegal felling of trees. Even otherwise, we make it clear that respondents during the implementation of the project, will not cut any tree situated lawfully or illegally and will follow all environmental norms, including compensatory plantation. That they will carry out the activity on the subject land only with due approval and compliance of the conditions imposed by the environment authorities." NCT said.

tion" on the area, which adds Aug 21 last year, which adds that no permission for felling of trees would be granted in the order, the court has observed that authorising persons recklessly granting permission for felling of trees and there was total non-appli-

scored the trees to facilitate infrastructure development with greenery and asked out horticulturists to come up with a "comprehensive plan" for transplantation or compensatory afforestation.

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**TASTE FOR CHANGE:** The cafe, led by blind women, is making its presence felt among the associates working across hospitality functions.

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