

# Vermillion brings Holi to James Beard House

ARTHUR J PAIS

"Right from the start we have been keen that Vermillion should be much more than a trendy Indian restaurant," says founder Rohini Dey of the four-year-old Chicago restaurant that has won praise from *USA Today*, *Esquire*, *BusinessWeek*, *Travel & Leisure* and many other publications. "We wanted to use Vermillion's popularity to give a higher profile to Indian cuisine in the mainstream, and we wanted to host important events featuring Indian writers and artists."

March 9, Vermillion brought Holi for the first time to the famous James Beard Foundation House in New York City in the presence of writer Salman Rushdie and his wife Padma Lakshmi. This established a new tradition — like the first Diwali dinner at the same venue two years ago, also hosted by Vermillion.

The culinary industry considers the Foundation, which hands out the James Beard awards every year to restaurants and food writers, the most important organization of its kind. It is generally known to celebrate American and European food.

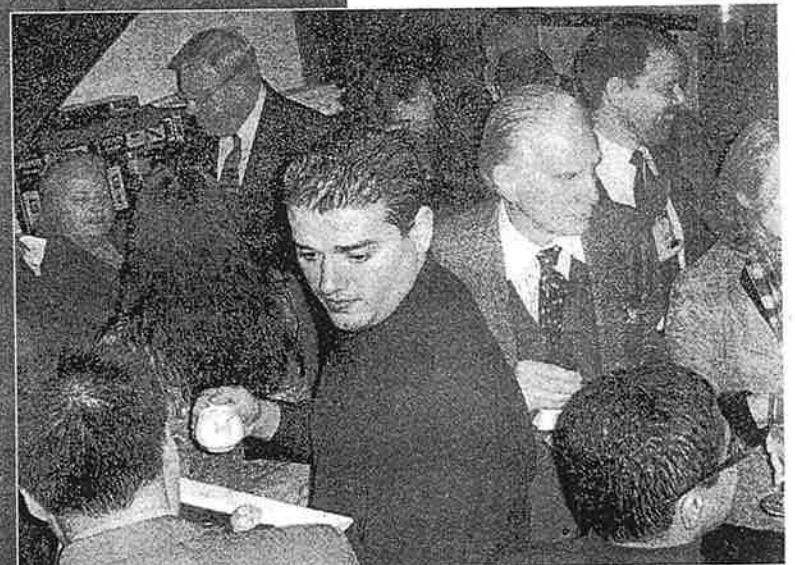
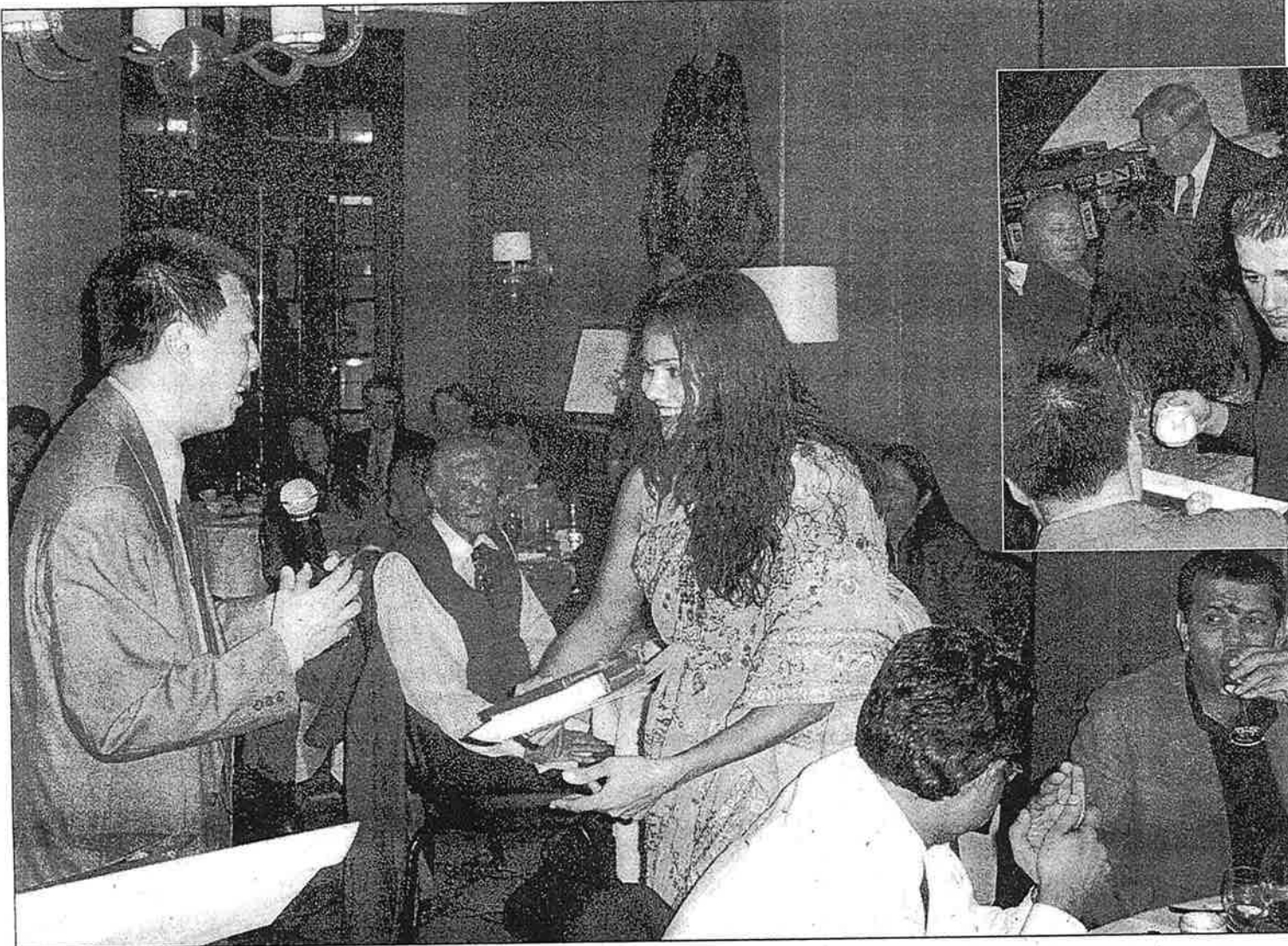
"People are surprised how versatile Indian food can be and how it can go well with other traditions," says Vermillion's executive chef Maneet Chauhan. One of her signature dishes is the Chilpachole de Jaiba Soup, made with crabmeat, lentils and two kinds of Central American chilies, pablano and jalapeno. Chauhan and Dey belong to a new generation of chefs and entrepreneurs who want to shake up negative stereotypes people have of Indian food.

At the Holi dinner that Vermillion



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■ Author Salman Rushdie and wife Padma Laxmi meet Vermillion executive chef Maneet Chauhan



■ Some guests at the do

■ Rohini Dey receives the James Beard certificate



# Riya Madan wins grand prize for poem on life

MONIKA JOSHI

A 12-year-old, who considers spelling to be one of her special skills, is set to become a published writer.

Riya Madan's poem, *Life is a Journey*, has won the grand prize at the EPIC New Voices Writing Competition for middle and high school students from across the world. Her poem will be part of an anthology, *EPIC New Voices 2007*, to be available for free download at the EPIC web site, [www.epicauthors.com](http://www.epicauthors.com)

EPIC, the Electronically Published Internet Connection, is a professional organization for published and contracted e-book and print authors and other publishing industry professionals. "Children are our future in many ways," Brenna Lyons, president of EPIC, said. "They aren't just the readers and writers of tomorrow, though New Voices celebrates that fully. They are the leaders and the voters. A strong reader grows into someone who can express himself and knows the value of research."

The contest was open to students attending public, private or home schools, and they could submit an entry in each of the three categories — poetry, essay and short story. The grand prize was chosen from among the first place winners in all categories. The prizes were presented at a conference in Virginia Beach, March 10. Madan could not attend as she was participating in a state-level piano competition



■ Riya Madan

hosted by the Minnesota Music Teachers' Association that weekend.

A seventh-grade student at Kellogg Middle School in Rochester, Minnesota, she is planning to invest the \$100 prize money in buying books. In addition, she will use the handheld book reader that is part of the grand prize to download "all the books I am unable to buy."

"It feels great to have accomplished something so challenging at such a young

age," she said.

Madan is the daughter of Meena, a homemaker, and Anil, a computer professional at IBM. She has an older sister, Shagun. "She is 17, a special needs child, and has been my inspiration for most of my

## *Life is a Journey*

*Walking through a path encased in willows and maples,*

*The wind drives me on my destined trail.*

*My soul is free and will forever be to tread the lands as I please.*

*Flying by with a whisper of thoughts, Weaving and weaving into a blanket of sorts,*

*Filled with tears, laughter, and joy...*

*My life is blowing by and by.*

*Dreams of ways to change my life*

*Come through my mind day by day.*

*Countless pleasures and countless sorrows*

*Keep my mind at bay.*

*A beautiful garden of buttercups and lilacs*

*My life is a mosaic of colors.*

*Why we exist is a question unanswered*

*An enchanting mystery forever.*

*A journey from start to end,*

*For some quick, for some slow.*

*Our destination is far away*

*Farther than we know.*

writings," Madan says.

The motivation for her winning entry came from the "ups and downs people face in their life" around the world, she said.

The interest in writing probably took birth when she was in her fourth grade at Ben Franklin Montessori School. Every week, she had an assignment in creative writing. "I think that writing so many times has helped me improve my writing skills quite a lot," she said. She still has a collection of over a hundred of her writing samples.

She has won district level prizes and participated in spelling contests organized by the North South Foundation. At age 6, she was declared the first place winner in the 6 and 7-year-old category. While reading is her passion, she enjoys dancing and has been doing so since age 5. She loves to perform *kathak* and Bollywood dances; she has learnt jazz, and plays the violin and the piano. In addition, she ice-skates and plays tennis. Among the extra-curricular activities she participates in school are Math Masters, MathCounts, Knowledge Bowl, Stock Market Game, Science Fair, Spelling Bee and Destination Imagination.

While her maternal uncle, Rajesh Chadha, is a published writer in India (in management), closer home, she finds her dad to be the one with writing skills. "He makes really annoying — but funny — stories too," she says.

*Epic New Voices 2008* will open for submissions August 1, 2007.

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hosted and Chauhan prepared, over 125 guests were welcomed with Holi colors. Veteran dancer Rajika Puri went around many tables daubing people with the colors. "But for the beautiful colors, I would have thought we are marking Ash Wednesday," said a guest, referring to the day Catholics mark their foreheads with ash at the beginning of the Lent season.

Dey had also invited several supporters of the American India Foundation, including Rajat Gupta, its co-founder, who was also one of Vermillion's first investors.

Gupta spoke briefly of how foundation worked with non-governmental organizations across India to raise more than \$40 million in the past six years.

Dey wants to take Vermillion's cuisine, which fuses Indian and Latin tradi-



■ Rajat Gupta, one of Vermillion's first investors, speaks

tions, to other cities. "We want to connect with Indian events and organizations in a handful of cities," she says.

In Chicago, it has held a book launch for Pulitzer finalist author Suketu Mehta (*Maximum City*). Mehta was also present at the Holi dinner in New York.

Vermillion has also organized a fashion photography gallery evening with the Art Institute of Chicago, an evening with author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Mistress of Spices*), a book launch for chef, actress and author Madhur Jaffrey (*Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of Growing Up in India*).

Paying tribute to the Hindi film industry, it has also organized Take 1-6, a celebration of Bombay street fare and Bollywood.

Dey and Chauhan, who attend key food expos each year, are pleased large number of Americans are discovering

that there is more to Indian food than overheated, oily curries from one or two regions from India.

The biggest challenge to them, they admit, is choosing traditionally popular dishes from many regions in India.

They are often surprised while holding a food festival at their own restaurant or hosting a special at the James Beard Foundation at the number of questions they have to take about Indian food, not only from Americans but also Indians.

They must be doing something right out there. When would they bring a Durga *pooja* celebrations to James Beard Foundation, a curious guest asked Dey. "Many people do not have an idea of the fish dishes India offers," he told Dey.

"Be careful. Your wish may come true," she told him with a chuckle.

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