

Home Foods-Food For Thought

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Everything in the room conveyed fumes, sweat and mopping brows. Yet toiling away tenaciously on the floor was a frail woman with her pallu wrapped demurely on her head and the end clutched in her mouth like a life saving anchor. Adding to this visage were huge gunny bags filled to the brim with jowar grains adorning to the perimeter of the room like artifacts in a museum. It all seemed like some every day scene of an obedient house wife fulfilling her core responsibility of 'Cooking for the family.' More than that, the scene conveyed a sense of positive exuberance just like the woman herself. Meet Alka in Ameerpet, an average, uneducated homemaker who used to cringe subserviently at the very sight of her in laws or husband. But right now, it is her nervous strength and the advantage of making Jowar rotis from her child hood that is paying rich dividends for the family. Making about 100-150 rotis a day is a cakewalk for her. A delivery boy collects them and transports them to the various hostels, curry points and eateries in the vicinity of Ameerpet and SR Nagar in Hyderabad. She averages a profit of Rs.4/- per roti and her monthly income of Rs.12000/- to Rs.15000/- would clearly give an MBA fresher a serious complex. Even as the age old debate about the role of women in modern society continues, she has quietly donned a new avatar to augment the household income.

Welcome to a small MIG Residential complex in Nacharam. In one of the ground floor apartment, the air was reverberating with raucous laughter, loud blaring music, clanging utensils, bustling helpers and maid servants, repartees and jokes galore! A group of ordinary, moderately educated housewives with clarity of mission, zeal and enthusiasm meet on and off every day like a kitty party to prepare huge quantities of 'Pindivantalu' or festival delicacies and savories. When they would have otherwise led boring, inconsequential lives under the shadows of their better halves, watching TV serials, stitching saree works, gossiping with neighbors etc., these women started this venture by pooling in their resources, rented an apartment in the ground floor and single mindedly embarked on this endeavor to supply home foods and savories to various customers. Clearly, this was like adding more 'moolah' to their kitty which is shared among them all. During festivals, these women happily work extra time to prepare snacks like 'Sakkinalu', 'Saravapindi', 'Janthikalu', 'Murukulu', 'Karampusa', 'Chakkalu', 'Garelu'(All flour based items), Pickles, Edible powders, traditional sweets like 'Ariselu', 'Boorelu', 'Bobbatlu', 'Poornalu', 'Boondi', 'Gavvalu', 'kajjikayalu', 'Ravva Laddulu' and last but not the least they even undertake festival orders like 'Pulihora', 'perugugarelu', 'Poornalu', 'Pongal', 'Payasam' etc. Clearly, these women have aimed high and achieved slam-dunk success. With a turnover running into thousands per month, plans afoot to consolidate existing clientele and gain new business. Hurrah! to home foods as the days of meaningless huff, puff, grunt, grumph, phew and sigh are over for these ladies who have customers coming even up to 08:30 in the night with many late comers going away disappointed due to sold out stock. This venture, by these enterprising ladies got a humongous amount exposure and their clientele now includes NRI's also, who fly off with bulk orders in their luggage.

On a lighter vein-There was a lady who treated her husband like a 'Greek God'. She places a burnt offering before him at every meal!

- On who does a husband with complaints against his wife's culinary skills, depend on to satiate his taste buds?
- Where does Shailaja, a beautician from 'Alankritha Beauty Parlor'in Nacharam, who is always hard pressed for time get piping hot meals (inclusive of simple sabzis, amazing phulkas, steaming sambar)?
- From where do kiran and his friends (all MBA & MCA students residing in bachelor quarters in Tarnaka) find it convenient to take home a curry packet along with sambar or rasam with occasionally some rotis thrown in?
- Sudheer (30) and his wife Samatha(28) both Software Engineers are working in Madhapur, Hyderabad. Together the couple may be earning a hefty pay package, but their life is peppered with stresses, strains, chaotic traffic snarls, pollution, domestic servant problems, work targets, etc. A part of their daily ritual is a haphazardly planned, rushed breakfast, tearing hurry to catch the office cab and a mad rush to reach the office on time from their own house in Hubsiguda. Coming back home at 07:30pm, both feel dog-tired & world weary with neither having any inclination to cook dinner by going through the entire rigmarole of sorting, selecting, cleaning, cutting and cooking vegetables. Even appointing a cook did not work out due to their erratic work schedules and punishing office hours. Instead of indulging in nagging or passing the buck, from where do both of them prefer to pick up hot steaming dal, palak paneer, carrot fry and rasam?

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➤ Earlier if you asked Praveena, an under graduate housewife about her domestic setup she would say 'My husband and son'. She would forget to count herself. Today, her reply to the same question would be 'Me, My Husband and My Son'. Though she speaks with an easy smile and her demeanor is very much like the quintessential woman next door, thanks to the changing times, now- a- days she has a purposeful glint in her eye when she decides to take the day off for her friends or attend the various functions of her relatives. When does Praveena cook for her husband and son while fulfilling her social obligations? She simply does not do it. Then, from where does she get 'cabbage coconut curry, Beerakaya pachadi & rasam for her office-going husband & school going son?

With life rushing past in top gear,
What is the attitude that people wear?
When all the energies are exhausted after a hard day's work,
What is that Hyderabad offers you as a perk?
When cooking as a chore!
Gets routine and becomes a bore!!
Where is it that people scurry for a curry?
Why worry for a curry, they echo in unison and head towards the nearest, friendly neighborhood
'CURRY POINT'
.....for their food!

Be it students, Bachelors, Working women, Software Engineers or any other professionals, we find them milling near the mushrooming, omni- present curry points to assuage their hunger pangs. The only effort on their part is to cook some rice. A 200gms curry pack costing (Rs.10-Rs.12/-) and 250ml of sambar, rasam or dal (costing Rs.5/ to Rs.6/-) is sufficient for 2 people.

In the last couple of years, the city has witnessed a proliferation of curry points at all almost every street, colonies and suburbs with a variety of local names like 'MARUTI CURRY POINT', 'RUCHI CURRY POINT', 'SAMPRADYA CURRY POINT', 'ABHRUCHI CURRY POINT', 'SRI SAI CURRY POINT' etc. The pioneer among them is the 'SPICY KITCHEN' opened in January 2004 by AVS Prasad, Yoga Instructor by profession who started off by supplying raw food to his students. He studied the market and realized the wide scope of good business in this market. His curry point became a much sought after place for students, bachelors, working women and housewives who craved to relax and longed for a change in their daily menu to whet their appetites. Prasad says the reasons for his success are-Maintaining quality in addition to quantity at a reasonable price.

Cut to the present scenario, we find that in the crowded areas of Ameerpet, SR Nagar, Yousufguda, Yellareddyguda, Tarnaka, Nacharam, Habsiguda, Nallakunta, Moulali, Malakpet, Dilsukh Nagar etc. Curry points are dime-a-dozen cashing in on the demand. Some curry points sell only vegetarian curries along with their regular sweets and savories. Others sell both Veg and Non-Veg steaming soups, salads, rice varieties and also some exclusive curries like 'FRIED PRAWNS', 'GONGURAMUTTON', 'NELLORE CHEPALA PULUSU', etc. Apart from the regular customers, on holidays, even large families line up to purchase from curry points so that they can have more time for entertainment. More than 20-30% of customers are occasional buyers says Satish, an employee of Sri Sai Abhruchi curry point at Himayath Nagar which claims to have many VIPs among its clientele. Cashing in on the fad, it has opened up three branches in the city, all offering hot and flaming curries with free home door delivery. Consolidating just three months after a launch? Clearly this seems to be curry point chutzpah for you. "And why not?" says an employee from Shruthi curry point in Ramnagar. He says-“ Some of the events that bring big business for us are-Birthdays, Anniversaries, Baby Showers, Bridal Showers, Christenings, Bachelor/Bachelorette parties, House warming ceremonies, Picnics, Receptions, Job Fairs, College festivals, Grand openings, Open House Picnics etc”.

Even skeptical naysayers have begun to lookup at the soaring sales. As the saying goes, 'Destiny favors the brave' and in the present scenario, '**Curry Points**' and '**Home Foods**' stand in a sea of opportunities. The 'Small Big Boys' are dreaming big and quite fittingly so. In a recent survey done in Nacharam, Tarnaka, Habsiguda, Mallapur & ECIL areas by the students of a management school, 64% of the respondents said that dining at home is a more intimate and special affair than dining out. 50% of them cited concerns about the current state of the economy and the increased cost of dining out. About 58% of them said that they preferred 'Home Foods' to packaged snacks of a variety of brands found in the market. A whopping 76% of the housewives prefer buying 'Home Foods' for special occasions signifying the rising trend of home makers veering towards more leisure time indulging in self development courses simultaneously serving a death knell to the idea of an Indian housewife spending long hours

in the kitchen cooking 'Only for the Family'. Don't even bother scratching your heads, for the once ubiquitous housewife no longer adds glory to the kitchen. Reams and reams of epitaphs can be written about the demise of the clichéd image. Does this sound like an exaggeration? The answer is an emphatic No! by the dynamic SRILAKSHMI or SRI SAI HOME FOODS, Nagarjun Nagar, Tarnaka even as she gushes that her business is touching a piping hot 50% increase in profit.

Now then, are we reading the writing on the wall correctly? Are **HOME FOODS & CURRY POINTS** here to stay? Is this the unsoiled harbinger of truth mandated to do its job as effectively as possible? In the emerging market-o-nomics, can new money seemingly be made by serving these newer niches? According to Chris Anderson on how endless choice is creating unlimited demand—"Our growing affluence has allowed us to shift from being bargain shoppers buying branded commodities to becoming mini-connoisseurs, flexing our taste with a thousand little indulgences that set us apart from others. We now engage ourselves in a host of new consumer behaviors that are described with intentionally oxymoronic terms like 'Massclusivity' and 'Mass Customization'".

As exemplified by the surge in sales in **Home Foods & Curry Points**, they may not be blockbusters taking on the might of the restaurant culture but they are definitely '**NICHEBUSTERS**', bringing marketing techniques to micro markets and have become an economic force to reckon with even as change in life styles are driving their business. This business is a people based service oriented business trying to create, meet and satisfy the need for food of discerning customers. As aptly said by George Bernard Shaw 'Love for Food is Sincerer than any kind of Love'. We can live without love but not without food. So why can't this market be successfully exploited? These Curry Points and Home Food joints have become so famous that enquiries have begun in other parts of the southern states of India, regardless whether this business model can cater to their local culinary tastes. Clichéd as it sounds, for a service oriented business like this; the customer is and must always remain the focal point of all its operations. Losing sight of this factor will threaten its very existence as we can witness an equal rate of curry points disappearing after a period of time while simultaneously, many more are sprouting every where. Customers are not even choosy about the limited menus. After all, all that the customers want is—

- a) Quality & Quantity of food.
- b) Best price.
- c) Hygiene.
- d) Modest, quick and efficient service.

If everyone wants a share in the pie, current players in the market clearly have their work cut out. Innovations truly distinguish leaders from wannabes. Differentiate from the herd by offering some supplementary benefits. Even as we wait with a bated breath to watch the way in which the '**CURRY WARS**' pan out, clearly it is not price but '**TASTE**' that has tantalizingly emerged the winner here.

"YOU CANNOT 'CARRY' FAVOR WITH THE CONSUMERS IF YOUR 'CURRY' DOES NOT HAVE A FLAVOUR FOR THEM".

It is here that these Home Foods and Curry Points can achieve a competitive edge by concentrating on outsourcing their product offerings to excellent, talented home makers like Alka etc. Whereby, tasty lip-smacking, home made varieties can be fully prepared to satisfy the needs of the target markets. This is win-win situation for all. Average uneducated housewives with a talent for cooking can earn an income without bothering about the nitty-gritties of marketing their food specialties, while these home foods joints and curry points can boast of offering "**HOME FOODS**" to their demanding customers.

With the players upbeat, the challenges should not be ignored in the background of rosy forecasts. They have to constantly upgrade themselves with some clinching value proposition. As they say-'Excellence is not a skill. It's an attitude & attitude is reflected in one's all actions'. If we analyze the success of **Sridevi Home Foods** at HMT Nagar Nacharam, their attitude says it all. The proprietor says—"Our customers never ask for a sample taste of our offerings. Whatever limited menu we have, it is prepared excellently and is totally mind blowing that often, the customers pass off our food products as their home made preparations to their friends and relatives etc to earn appreciation and praise for the culinary skills."

So even as home foods and curry points have become a match made in heaven as both are attaining synergistic pay offs, complacency should never set in. Because clearly, this emerging niche market within the mass market is the flavor of the season. Why not, when consumers know what they want, they can cut through the crap, ignore advertisements, hunt for best deals and know which price level suits their individual requirements best!

'**MY KIND OF BRAND**' is what the consumers are asking for and the marketers have no choice but to give in to their demand. We can safely concur & conclude at that!

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rural market. Developed and smaller states like Punjab, which have good infrastructure, can be a good place to start from.

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