



MAHADEVAN

ICON OF THE GOURMET EMPIRE



A teenager moves from a village to a town to pursue his higher studies. With his mother's blessings and a couple of hundred bucks in his pocket, this young lad with a burning ambition, moves into the city in search of his destiny. Inspired by a book, quits his job as a professor and chooses to be an entrepreneur in the "food Business". He works hard to make his dream of making it big, a reality. He starts with a small Chinese joint, adds a lot of different flavour to his venture by stacking more cuisines and restaurants, slowly builds the chain, forays into the baking industry, explodes into 20 other countries, employs 5000+ people and is seen as one of the most successful businessmen today.

Yes, it does sound like a Kollywood story but the interesting part is that this is a true life story of a person who started right here in the city of Chennai. The story of a foodie, professor, serial entrepreneur, restaurateur who is also a very empathetic, grounded, passionate, extremely shrewd and service oriented gentle/business man. This is the story of Mr. M. Mahadevan or "Hot Breads Mahadevan" as he is fondly called.

The initial years:

His parents were doctors and he is the youngest of the six children." I am what I am today with the blessings of my mother"



and by being in the 'right place at the right time", as he recalls. He always wanted to paint on a bigger canvas and was keen to build his own empire.

After post-graduation in PSG, Coimbatore, he came to Chennai. He did not know anyone in Chennai and the friend's house that his brother had asked him to go to was locked. That night, he had to sleep in the veranda of the friend's house. That is how his journey in Chennai started. That moment affected him so much and an extreme sense of empathy for the homeless was ignited. Much later, this incident triggered him to contribute to "Night Shelters" at Chennai Corporation.

The turning-point:

His first job was at AM Jain College as a professor. The teaching job did not satisfy the hunger of this dynamic young man. He wanted to do something more and his calling was the 'food industry". He was influenced by the best seller novel "Hotel" by Arthur Hailey. He enrolled himself as the night duty manager at RK Lodge. He was moonlighting with these two jobs for some time. This initial experience he had, working at the RK Lodge actually made him a 'man'. He learnt the nuances of the industry, learning the pains and joys of the Chefs to duty managers to the waiters to cleaner boys. He felt good

to be amidst the chatter of all the happy people who walked in to the restaurant.

It was here that he experienced this great yearning to become a rich man. One of the nights, he saw a rich man at the bar, spending as much money on the drinks as was his own monthly salary. He checked with the rich man what he was doing for his living and he happened to be doing some kind of a business. The fire in young Mahadevan's belly was kindled and he realized that his calling was to become a business man, in the food industry and build an empire for himself!

When he told his mother about quitting his job as a teacher to build a hotel business, she was aghast at the decision of him moving away from the sacred profession of teaching. But he was able to convince her that he is not going to be cleaning tables but building a business that put her apprehensions to rest and blessed him to go and conquer his dreams!

No looking back:

He started his first Chinese take away joint "TICTAC" even when he was still teaching. This became a great hit with the students. He used innovation in the flavours to attract young consumers. "Give them what they need" is his mantra, instead of being a stickler to authentic oriental foods. In his own words, he practices 'Maathi yosi' as a key to success in business. Later, he also played with the idea of bringing the kitchen out or visible to the customers by putting a glass wall in his small format restaurants. This not only looked elegant and gave a chance to customers to watch how their food was being prepared, but also brought down his infra costs substantially. That is Mr. Maathi Yosi for you!

He established the Oriental Cuisines Ltd in the year 1994. He started with the Chinese and slowly added an amazing range of cuisines and spread all over the globe. From tantalizing Thai to Spanish, to the



healthy richness of the Malabar Coast, austere Japanese to spicy Chinese, fun and fast eats to exquisite patisserie and rich desserts. Oriental Cuisines' brands include The French Loaf, Le Chocolatier, Sera Tapas Bar and Restaurant, Benjarong, Teppan, EnteKeralam, Wangs Kitchen, China Town, Va Pho and Planet Yumm. The sheer variety of cuisines, the tone and the theme of each of these restaurants speaks volumes about the passion, eye for details and the appetite for success in this vibrant and energetic gentleman.

He parallelly established the most popular chain for pastries and breads, the "Hot Breads". While cooking is an 'art', baking is a 'science' he says and hence easy to replicate even with unskilled labour. No doubt on this, as It has 150+ outlets and expanded into countries like USA, UK, Singapore, Dubai and more. His business strategy for expansion is through partners who are willing to invest. He is indeed a 'people's man' and handles a startling figure of 320+ partners as of now!

He was instrumental in taking the brands like Saravana Bhavan , Anjappar, Sangeetha

outside India. He was able to convince the brand owners on taking the risk of opening their restaurants in the foreign lands without compromising on the quality or the signature taste of each of these brands. He painstakingly planned it out, managed the laws of the land and struggled for the Visas of chefs to move from India to other countries. Thanks to him, the Indian fraternity across the globe can now experience the joy of immersing themselves into the spicy sambar with masala dosai or the biryani of their choice!

His advice to budding entrepreneurs: Any business has its own challenges and risks attached to it. The vociferous Mahavedan says. "This business is the most profitable and also highly suicidal. The main challenge in this business is to find and retain the skilled people".

He is able to run all these multiple chains successfully because of two things that he is excellent at, which are "knowing the numbers" and also 'doing his homework diligently". His advice to the budding entrepreneurs is also the same. As he demonstrates, just passion is not enough



to succeed. One has to have the drive to accomplish and achieve. He also never takes any short cuts and makes sure that it is a win-win to all stake holders.

Success redefined:

A business man evolves over time and he soon realised that his success was not in just building a billion dollar business but be able to give back to the society, create an impact

and thus share the success. The main dish on his success menu card is providing employment to 5000+ people so far. He believes that a successful enterprise is one that has empowered women and supports in bringing the differently abled people into the mainline. As an example, his new chain of coffee shop called 'Writer's Café' in Chennai, partnering with Higginbothams, is run by ladies who are burn survivors. He has a Hot breads outlet that is run by spastic boys & girls. He sponsors night shelter in Chennai Corporation for destitute and abandoned people. He also runs a lot of charity schemes, like providing healthy breakfast to underprivileged primary school kids. Every year he conducts a two day festival during the Joy of Giving week. It is called the "Seva mela" where more than 75 NGOs converge to showcase their causes. It is a fun event and urges the public to eat, play and donate. All the money collected during this event goes to his trust for sponsoring charity activities. The 'Freedom' bread that was baked by the inmates of the Puzhal prison is the brainchild of Mr.Mahadevan by making the prisoners productive and earn a living. These are just a few to quote from his long list of generous, innovative charitable activities that he does.

The journey continues:

This 63 year old prodigy, who has carved a niche for himself in the vast food services industry under three banners , the "Hot Breads", "Oriental Cuisines & " CC Fine Foods' catering to both the " class" and the "mass ", with his outstanding entrepreneurial grit, 320+ partners, 500 + eateries of various kinds across 20+ countries, receiver of many prestigious awards, creating a huge impact on the society by offering thousands of jobs , including the disadvantaged and women in his success expedition, giving back to the public through his numerous charity activities is indeed fit to be called " The Icon of the Gourmet empire". Chennai is proud of him. The journey continues...

- Hema Rao