



# Sweet Stories of success

ENTERPRISE - ADYAR ANANDA BHAVAN



Adyar Ananda Bhavan needs no introduction to a Chennaiite. The ubiquitous sweet shop cum restaurant with yellow and blue signage that dot the city scape, has come to be a destination for all reasons and seasons. Visiting a relative in Odisha? Need a hamper for a delegation at work? A pit-stop to grab a quick bite enroute Madurai-Bangalore? Interesting and yummy gift boxes during festivals? No worries, AAB or A2B has you covered.

With an expansively curated menu that features Pan-Indian traditional sweets and savouries, A2B has not just carved a niche for itself in the last 35-years but has also grown exponentially. The chain restaurant has gone global and become a place that customers identify as their second home, wherever it's found on the map. With a 1000 crore turnover, it has around 20 eateries in megapolis such as the US, Canada, Australia, UK, Kenya, Singapore. In India, 160 branches have a bustling team of around 14,000 employees catering to their customers'

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preferences with the same verve as when they started.

The two brothers Sri. K.T. Venkatesan and Sri. K.T. Srinivasa Raja, the prolific men behind the success of A2B, took a walk down memory lane, in a freewheeling discussion on A2B's inception, growth, their philosophies and more.

Hailing from an agrarian family, a brutal drought year forced the patriarch, Sri. K. S. Thirupathi Raja, to explore other avenues to generate livelihood. He started a sweet shop, Guru Sweets, in 1970 in their small town. His wife made the sweets at home and they struggled

to straddle farming and the shop, both of which didn't yield good results. Entrepreneurship is a road that leads to many different destinations, and in their case, their father decided to shut down Guru Sweets and relocate to Bangalore in 1980 to open Srinivasa Sweets there. The brothers dropped out of school to pitch in and help the family business, learning the ropes from their parents.

The family toiled hard for years, which did not exactly yield good returns. By 1988, Sri Thirupathi Raja, once again decided to explore for more options. His search for a more favourable location brought him to North Chennai and a third sweet shop named Shri Ananda Bhavan was opened in 1988 at Washermanpet. And the rest as the saying goes, would turn out to be an illustrious history for their enterprise. Third time lucky, the venture clicked instantly and as a catalyst for building a business driven by growing customer demand, they opened a couple of more branches, one each in Kilpauk and Adyar. The thespian then handed the reigns over to his two sons and took a back-seat.

Sri. Srinivasa Raja, recalling the initial days, said that although there were other sweet shops in the area, they were able to get a toe-hold for themselves at a good location in Adyar. One vision that fascinated them was the need to spread their branches like the famed Banyan Tree that was an iconic landmark in Adyar. They added 'Adyar' to Ananda Bhavan and the name and business entered its golden-age that resulted in spawning generations of customer base. They say they were blessed as customers would come in droves from other neighbourhoods of Chennai as early as 5.30 am, and patiently chit-chat and read the morning papers while waiting for their shutters to open. The realisation that they were chosen over the other shops at closer proximity to their residences was a huge impetus for them to live up to and exceed

expectations to sustain their patronage. Sri Venkatesan is a natural at curating recipes. Under his leadership, expert chefs were recruited from different states to make their authentic traditional recipes, and the repertoire on offer has many varieties - from the athirasams and Mysore pak of the South to the steamed sweets and rosgullas of the East, to the dry fruit and nuts fare of the West to the milk-based pedas of the North. He has his finger on the pulse of the customer demand for when he noticed a shift in footfalls in the different age categories, his research led to introducing healthier steamed dishes varieties. More wholesome evening tiffins made their way into the menu too. Sri Venkatesan brought in the speciality of a region such as their famed Rajapalayam thattai and pakoda, thatte idli, dhokla and more such evergreen items that remind one of home. Right now, their products are stocked at retail stores. A different kitchen manages production, as the ingredients used have a longer shelf life. The pricing will vary from the products from the AAB or A2B stores.

In 2000, they opened branches on the highways, which was a win-win for both them and the travellers. They now have two big factories in Chennai and Bangalore and smaller units in Coimbatore and Thanjavur along with a retail outlet in Delhi. In keeping with times, they have also gone digital with the A2B app, to give our customers the added comfort of delivering their orders at their doorstep. Their R & D wing is very advanced, with a microbiology lab to AI interface, and they use state-of-the-art facilities and automation to help cope with the volumes. Keeping quality in mind they do not reuse oils, instead give it to a refinery, where it is made into crude oil. They are also particular about their pricing being easily affordable to all.

Sri Srinivasa Raja says they stay grounded to their agrarian roots and ensure that they buy their produce and milk directly





from farmers. “Having experienced hunger and poverty, we try to give back to the community in every way we can. As part of A2B’s CSR efforts, we ensure drinking water supply and maintain hygiene in hospitals in the villages that we’ve adopted. Anna and I didn’t have a chance to study, so we ensure that we promote education among our workforce and their families, similarly we support free meals programs, where three square meals are provided,” they mention.

Sri Srinivas Raja says that gratitude, integrity, hard work, commitment and patience are their recipes for success. Perseverance has guided them through challenging times, enabling the achievement of goals which includes the possibility of going public.

The age-old Sanskrit adage, “Mata, Pitha, Guru, Deivam,” is the North-star that they seek guidance from and attribute A2B’s evolution to all contributing factors, including loyal staff, some of whom have been with them for decades, to attachment from customers, to good relationship with vendors - a journey that has led to mutual growth of all concerned.

With the next generation stepping in, Sri Srinivasa Raja clarifies, that while they still take executive decisions, Sri Venkatesan’s son, Vishnu Shankar has now joined in. The other well-educated children are waiting in the wings to fit in. Senior staff members and the next rung of management committee are also part of their backbone.

A2B is a case in point of expansions from humble origins in the southern Tamil Nadu town of Rajapalayam. The uneducated villagers in them, look back on their journey and feel gratitude for the many opportunities and blessings and whole-heartedly thank their patrons who identified with them.