

From Grassroots to Success: A Case Study of a Successful Goan Woman Entrepreneur

* Juao C. Costa

** Harshal Shah

*** Kapil Korgaonkar

Abstract

Goa – The Pearl of the East on the world map, flaunts its serene and beautiful beaches and ancient Portuguese architecture that attracts an influx of tourists and boosts the economy. Besides this, Goa, the twenty fifth state of federal India, is famous for its own authentic and unique cuisine and sea-food. More specifically, we find an increasing number of tourists looking out for authentic Goan cuisine. One of the success stories worth mentioning is of an entreprenuring widow from Betalbatim, South Goa who stood against the tide, stuck to her grass roots, and proved her abilities in providing authentic Goan dishes. Martin's Corner was established in 1989 by the Late Mr. Martin Pereira as a corner shop where local village boys would come to play carom or to grab a soft drink. Mrs. Carafina, the wife of Late Mr. Martin Pereira along with her dedicated sons, started serving popular Goan dishes, which instantly became famous among the Goans for her exquisite cooking. In no time, her delicacies became popular not only in Goa, but outside Goa too. Today, it has grown to become one of Goa's most talked about and most frequented multi-cuisine restaurants for authentic Goan and fresh sea food. It has been patronized by many Bollywood film stars, top cricketers, politicians, corporates, foreign tourists, and not to forget, Goans from all walks of life. Also noteworthy is their ability to serve both vegetarian and non-vegetarian clientele. Every scrumptious meal in the evening at Martin's Corner is accompanied with live entertainment. The ambience portraying Goan culture, casual, and easy atmosphere leaves you with a feeling of contentment. What is the secret behind the success of Mrs. Pereira's (who has not learned the ropes of management from a B-school) entrepreneurial venture? How did she manage to market her small corner shop to become a popular food stop for many rich and famous personalities as well as middle class people? The present case study explores the journey of Martin's Corner from a small corner shop to one of the most popular and loved restaurants in Goa.

Keywords: corner, sea food, entrepreneur, hospitality industry, marketing

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Mr. Bonnie Pereira receives a call from his regular loyal client from the airport, informing him about his arrival in Goa, and requesting him to prepare a takeaway of his favourite Goan fish curry and rice. The client sends his driver to pick up the same. The driver, who was new to the place, visits a place with the similar name "Martins Place" in Margao. On asking the person - the in-charge about the parcel, the person prepares the same takeaway, without bothering to inform the driver about the whereabouts of the real place. Mr. Bonnie Pereira receives a call from his client expressing great disappointment and discontentment about the food preparation, upon which Mr. Bonnie Pereira goes and checks on the same ... only shocked to find the parcel still there at his counter!

A Modest Beginning

In 1989, Mr. Martin Pereira retired from his services at Marmagoa Port Trust. Not knowing what lay ahead, he invested about ₹ 60,000 - a major part of his savings - and started up a small backyard general store. This store was one of the very few stores found in the village other than those found in the main market. This store also catered to grocery items and served as a place for the youth of the village to play carom, and in this way, "Martin's Corner" was born. People and neighbors were quite skeptical about the venture because of its interior location and lack of expertise.

* Associate Professor, Rosary College of Commerce and Arts, Navelim, Salcete - 403 707, Goa. E mail- juao@rediffmail.com

** EMBA Student, Goa Institute of Management, Ribander - 403 006, Goa. E mail- harshal.shah19@hotmail.com

*** EMBA Student, Goa Institute of Management, Ribander - 403 006, Goa. E mail- kkorgaonkar2@gmail.com

Mrs. Carafina Pereira, wife of Mr. Martin Pereira, then brought in innovation and started a small restaurant with the concept of take-aways. Deep within, confident about her hand in the kitchen with Goan cuisine, she passionately sensed the need for serving this rich cuisine. And so, she catered to sausage bread, pork chops, beef chilli fry, recheado mackerel, and so forth, besides Goan fish curry and rice. With no great expectations, but with great emphasis on quality and with a lot of passion, they moved ahead, unable to comprehend or imagine what the future had in store for them.

The Growth Phase

The Pereira's business started growing, and with the growth in business, space became a constraint. This forced them to utilize a part of their ancestral house to accommodate the growing number of customers. They lay great emphasis on the ambience of the place, with the roofing creating an authentic Goan feel, and the paintings on the wall depicting the essence of Goa, with works of the famous - Goa's very own Mario Miranda adorning the walls. With four chairs and a table that functioned as a setup initially, in 1990, they grew to a capacity of 40 chairs. As business increased by leaps and bounds, Mrs. Pereira's three sons began to help initially to keep pace with the growing clients and later on, they became partners in the business. They entered into business at a time when most of the Goans preferred to work on board as part of the merchant Navy, in the Gulf and in Europe, for greener pastures.

Today, they have no regrets about their decision to help their mother in her venture, which was initially not so fascinating to the surrounding villagers. With no knowledge of scientific management, business was carried out strictly by inadvertently following the principles of management. Running the show from their own premises helped to curtail costs and assured the best quality as Mrs. Cerafina Pereira concentrated on the originality and freshness of the masalas and ingredients, and the sons focused on aspects such as service, procurement of fresh stocks, cash flows, and marketing of their restaurant. In 2007, the sitting capacity was increased drastically, by creatively making an extension to accommodate 260 customers at a time. According to Mr. Bonnie Pereira (Mrs. Pereira's son), on a particular night during the peak season, it was possible to cater to approximately 400 guests with this extension. Yet, beamed a proud Mr. Bonnie Pereira, the waiting list outside their restaurant is inevitable during the peak season!

Budding Business

To keep pace with competition and to fulfill the needs of their beloved customers, Mrs. Pereira decided to diversify their product line by introducing Chinese, Continental, and Tandoori cuisine in their menu. The turning point in this journey came when the famous master blaster - Sachin Tendulkar - gave his interview in the Times of India quoting, "My favorite dish is my mother's curry followed by Martin's Corner king crab prepared by Mrs Pereira." Quite interestingly, the vision or inspiration to cater to authentic Goan cuisine was outgrown as a result of customers coming all the way from different places and the desire of the Pereira family to give the best in terms of versatility in their cuisines that would be provided under one roof. The sincerity and quality maintained by them bore fruit, with renowned travel magazines and web portals publishing reviews about the authentic Goan and Chinese cuisine and so forth served at Martin's Corner. In addition, the growing stream of celebrities and VIPs visiting the restaurant also increased the visibility of the restaurant, and aided in bringing them customers.

The peak season is during the months of December to January. Mr. Bonnie Pereira, a partner and son of Mrs. Carafina jibes, "Interestingly, off late, there has been a drastic increase in customers during the months of May, June, and July." Also, with Goa being a tourist destination, the seasonal breakup of guests comprises of 40% foreign tourists and 60% Indian tourists. The owners proudly mentioned that the presence of guests at their restaurant during the off-season is much higher than the number of guests frequenting the restaurant of any competitor within the region. During this period (the off season), emphasis is given to corporate events, guests from conferences, the local tourists, and also NRIs who visit Goa, as a major population of Goa comprises of NRIs.

Unique Selling Point

Martin's Corner has the advantage of being the first mover in establishing the uniqueness and authenticity of the Goan

cuisine. It is located about 5 km away from the main connected city Madgao, also the closest location to the Airport. The restaurant is situated just a kilometer away from the beautiful untouched beach of Betalbatim. Located in a lush green typical Goan village with a flora of fruiting trees like mango, coconut, jackfruit, and so forth, the environment of the place and the ambience of the restaurant has a relaxing effect on the customers. The place is an ideal place to be in the evening, with ample of parking place. The multi cuisine menu has lots to offer to satiate the taste buds of the customers. From Sorpotel bread relished by the local patrons in 1989, Martin's Corner is today known for its specialty Goan cuisine comprising of 'Snapper reicheido,' 'Pomfret caldin,' and in regular Goan delights of Goan fish curry, 'Vindaloo,' 'Chicken cafreal,' 'Ambot tik,' 'Prawn balchao,' and 'xec xec'. Seafood consists of the king crab, tiger prawns, pomfrets, king fish, snapper, squids, pickled fish, and shark among others. Pickled fish, also called fish mol, is a Goan delicacy. Martin's Corner bears a registered trademark for its name, so is protected from copycat competition.

Fresh stocks of perishable supplies are maintained as the family exercises strict control on the supplies. The response Mrs. Carafina Pereira received for her cooking and the amazing growth in business was achieved by minimal costs in advertising and by word-of-mouth publicity; silently and humbly creating unendorsed brand ambassadors who gave Martin's Corner an edge into the up- market. According to Mr. Bonnie Pereira, they neither depend upon the tour operators nor upon the taxi drivers to bring in customers. With clients like Sanjay Dutt, Rakesh and Hrithik Roshan, Suzanne Roshan, Jaya Bachchan, Abhishek and Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Remo Fernandes, Sharad Pawar, Madhuri Dixit, Ravi Shastri, John Abraham, Bipasha Basu, and Ranbir Kapoor, the list can go on and on with the foreign tourists and Goan politicians as regulars. The only man with 100 centuries to his credit on Earth, Sachin Tendulkar came searching for his favourite crab masala fry even when his most awaited century was celebrated by his family. New concepts like introducing the corporate illusionist Edmundo Da cunha to lure and leave a lasting impression on The Big B Mr. Amitabh Bachchan; Mrs. Carafina Pereira personally preparing the very famous goan Bhendi Caldin have done their bit to make the restaurant more popular!

Customer engaging entertainment like live karaoke, musical nights, tie-ups with corporates for corporate events, and its tie-ups with MakeMyTrip and foreign charters, especially after its new venture - a hotel - Martin's Comfort have further consolidated their brand. It is worthy to mention that the humble and welcoming nature that is a unique and ingrained in the entire family has helped them to create a legacy by not compromising on quality for quantity (money) ever!

The Human Touch

Dyer (1986) carried out an in-depth study of the culture of family firms with value based organizational culture model, and analyzed different characteristics on 3 levels: Basic, assumptions, and values and artifacts. He proposed a cultural configuration for these types of firms by combining general models of organizational culture, that is, paternalistic, laissez faire, participation, and profession with models of family culture, that is, patriarchal, collaborative, conflictive, and board culture as bureaucratic, rubber stamp, consultative, and supervisory. According to Denison, Lief, and Ward (2004), it is clear that family business sustainability and accomplishments are rooted in something deeper, something beyond superficial explanation. Belief in the innate value and uniqueness of family business culture drove collaboration on this project between the disciplines of family business and organizational behavior. The study suggested that family firms perform better because of who they are. In addition, recent research shows that they also perform better because of what they do strategically. Their histories and shared identities provide a connectedness to time-tested core values and standards of behavior lead to bottom-line success.

Interestingly, it is observed that it is this family culture has been the go getter for success in Martin's Corner. The mother is highly respected, which is an added advantage, and builds on the organizational commitment as it gets across all levels, because of the high trust factor. The first startup with Ms. Carafina operating as the Master Chef had just two cooks. Today, their employee count stands at 45, which includes:

👉 **Service Section:** Captains, senior waiters, waiters, and assistant waiters.

➤ **Production / Kitchen:**

- (1) Indian Cuisine (1 cook, 1 assistant cook),
- (2) Goan Cuisine (2 cooks, 3 assistant cooks),
- (3) Chinese Cuisine (1 cook, 1 assistant cook),
- (4) Continental Cuisine(1 cook, 1 assistant cook),
- (5) Tandoori Cuisine (1 cook, 1 assistant cook),
- (6) Pantry (1 cook, 1 assistant cook).

60 % of the staff is permanent and 40% is temporary, as the nature of the business is seasonal. The permanent staff has been working at Martin's Corner for 15 years, portraying exceptional employee loyalty. The recruited staff, especially at the top level, are some of the best from the industry, thus maintaining a good employee brand. The lower level employees are covered for EPf and ESI. Mr. Bonnie Pereira proudly boasts of the basic pay for employees being on the higher side as he uses this as a motivational tool to emphasize on employee retention. At Martin's Corner, they have few employee recognition and motivational programs, for example, an employee completing 10 years of service is gifted with a gold chain. He also emphasized on the autonomy that is given to the employees to boost their creativity and growth.

Diversification

In 2007, with an investment of about ₹ 1.5 crores , Ms. Carafina entered into the hotel segment with Martin's Comfort. Their hotel is located just a few metres away from Martin's Corner, and has about 18 rooms with 15 employees. The occupancy rate for the same is about 90% in the peak season and 50% during the off season. Tie-ups with charters like the travel agency Jewel in the Crown and MakeMyTrip have been an added advantage in maintaining a good number of footfalls to the hotel. Major bookings have been both online as well as walk in. With all these efforts, Mr. Bonnie said that they have been able to break even this year.

Also, they have a mouth watering display of pastries at Martin's Corner, which has been outsourced to Daily Bread, a pre-eminent brand in the bakery sector in India. When questioned about further diversification in North Goa for the people who have to travel all the way to the South to visit the restaurant, Mr. Bonnie smiled and told us the number of times his mother Ms. Carafina has prepared curries at 2:00 a.m. to maintain the best quality and freshness. Furthermore, he explained about the hectic schedule they had (the family had to attend to the children and also, they needed some personal time), but stressed the importance and personal attention his mother gives to the restaurant, as supreme quality (and not earning more and more money) has always been their priority. Hence, opening a new restaurant was not on the cards (as of now). However, he did mention about the packaging industry, as they had a brief stint with Sachin Tendulkar's restaurant in Mumbai, and they were still working out the details for the same.

Awards and Recognition

- "The Foodie Award 2012" for Best Coastal Food Restaurant was awarded to Mrs. Carafina Pereira of Martin's Corner, Betalbatim, Goa.
- "The Entrepreneurship Award 2012 " by the Gomantak Vidya Niketan was awarded to Mrs. Carafina Pereira.
- Trip advisor "Certificate of Excellence" 2012 was awarded to Martin's Comfort.
- Martin's Corner was nominated for the " All Time Favourite Restaurant" along with Café Britania, Mumbai ; Trishna, Mumbai ; Flury's, Kolkata; Angeethi, Hyderabad at the NDTV Good Times Food Awards, 2011.
- Mrs. Carafina Pereira was awarded " The Life Time Achievement Award" at the International Cuisine Conference held in Goa in 2007.

✍ Martin's Corner received a special mention in the prestigious Frommer's Guide, an international travel magazine.



Marketing Strategy

Quality products served with a smiling face and human touch is the core marketing strategy of Martin's Corner. The warmth and presence of the family adds to this personalized family culture, reinforcing the attention and importance they portray. The fresh stock of vegetables along with the fresh sea food is their USP, unlike their competitors, who store their stocks for longer periods of time. According to Mr. Bonnie Pereira, they do not advertise their restaurant on a large scale, neither sponsor any events like their competitors. In fact, they created their blue ocean within red oceans as a part of their marketing strategy.

Challenges Ahead

With an increase in copycat competition and increase in costs due to inflation, it will be indeed a great challenge for this women entrepreneur and her family to stand against all odds and inspire the next generation to go on running their restaurant and hotel.

Managerial Implications

The present case study brings forth the entrepreneurial skills in a family business that focuses on a value-based approach to management. Some of the most important points observed are:

- ✍ Values should be defined in ways that are simple and clear to everyone in the organization.
- ✍ There should be synchronization; linking values and what they mean in terms of employee behaviors.
- ✍ Employee commitment can be paid attention to by hiring and recognizing employees based on a value system.
- ✍ The study highlights the paternalistic and laissez faire models of management, with a belief in the innate value and uniqueness of the family business culture.
- ✍ Organizational commitment is reflected in a sense of respect, trust, belief, and faith in the organizational system.
- ✍ The core values form the basis of the organization's policies and actions, and are generally not compromised for short-term benefits or financial gains. For example, as in the case of Martin's Corner, a strong emphasis was laid upon personal touch and quality. The case also focuses on being the first mover, with uniqueness and authenticity being the unique selling points that were strategically implemented in the family business.
- ✍ The marketing strategy approach of Martin's Corner is minimal and interesting, with least importance given to advertising and sponsoring events. Being in the service sector, a lot of emphasis is given to the human touch in terms of the smile, warmth, and presence of the family. Also, focus on quality and freshness is a strong market pull. Thus, word-of-mouth publicity and silently and humbly creating unendorsed brand ambassadors has given an edge to Martin's Corner, thereby enabling it to move into the list of up-market, most sought after restaurants that is even frequented by celebrities and VIPs. This also built customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, thereby creating a blue ocean strategy in the red ocean.

Autonomy practiced to focus on customer satisfaction is also a booster for employee morale. Recognizing employee commitment also helps in creating employee satisfaction and retention. There should also be organizational evolution or incremental change. These evolutionary patterns evolve as a result of the need to achieve consistency and adhere to environmental demands. Thus, this implies being sensitive to new trends and forces that point towards diversification and growth. To conclude, it is observed from the present case study that values drive culture, culture in turn drives employee fulfillment, employee fulfillment drives customer satisfaction, which drives shareholder value.

Teaching Notes

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term benefits or financial gains. For example, as in the case of Martin's Corner, a strong emphasis was laid upon personal touch and quality. The case also focuses on being the first mover, with uniqueness and authenticity being the unique selling points that were strategically implemented in the family business.

The marketing strategy approach of Martin's Corner is minimal and interesting, with least importance given to advertising and sponsoring events. Being in the service sector, a lot of emphasis is given to the human touch in terms of the smile, warmth, and presence of the family. Furthermore, focus on quality and freshness is a strong market pull. Thus, word-of-mouth publicity and silently and humbly creating unendorsed brand ambassadors gave a competitive edge to Martin's Corner. Their brand reputation was also built on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, thereby creating a blue ocean strategy in the red ocean. Autonomy practiced to focus on customer satisfaction is also a booster for employee morale. Recognizing employee commitment also helps in creating employee satisfaction and retention. There should also be organizational evolution or incremental change. These evolutionary patterns evolve as a result of the need to achieve consistency and to adhere to environmental demands. Thus, this implies being sensitive to new trends and forces that point towards diversification and growth. To conclude, it is observed from the present case study that values drive culture, culture in turn drives employee fulfillment, employee fulfillment drives customer satisfaction, which drives shareholder value.

The case study on Martin's Corner shows how entrepreneurial skills with value added personal touch and quality can become the driving force for the success of a business. An extraordinary visionary, Mrs. Carafina Pereira, backed up with a value system that can go against the trend, and with no specialized management training, utilized her talent and skills to become one of the most popular Goan cuisine chefs of recent times. Mrs. Pereira, along with her family, is successfully running her restaurant and is delivering authentic, delicious, and a pleasurable Goan experience to their customers. In case of Martin's Corner, people, value based organizational culture, processes, products, and simplicity are their key enablers. This case study is a refreshing work on the amazing growth in business involving minimal costs in advertising and using the best approach - word-of-mouth publicity and silently and humbly creating unendorsed brand ambassadors - that gave Martin's Corner a competitive edge.

Retaining their staff and rewarding their employees for their excellent services and creating a good brand image to attract talent is one of their back bone strategies to excel in the services industry. However, change is constant today and so is maintaining one's position, and this is where the challenge lies! Mrs. Pereira has made a smart move and has diversified into the hotel business by opening up a hotel - Martin's Comfort - which is at a short distance from their restaurant. However, with an increase in cut-throat competition and increase in costs with inflation, it will be indeed a great challenge for this gutsy women entrepreneur and her family to stand against all odds and inspire the next generation to go on running their entrepreneurial venture successfully.

Issues Raised in the Case

- ✍ Current marketing strategy used (no advertisement, only free word of mouth publicity) - will it be useful in the future considering growing competition?
- ✍ Should the Pereira family try to expand their business - by opening restaurants in other parts of Goa - to capture a wider market?
- ✍ Diversification into the hotel business, that is, Martin's Comfort, is it a good step? Is that helping them in their current restaurant business?
- ✍ Labour turnover of 40%, does it affect the functioning of the restaurant in anyway?



Teaching Themes / Teaching Objectives

- ✍ The challenges of maintaining a number one position in the restaurant business in Goa.
- ✍ Free word of mouth publicity marketing over other marketing strategies.
- ✍ Employee retention policies.
- ✍ Family business sustainability and accomplishment.

↳ Paternalistic, laissez faire models of management, with a belief in the innate value and uniqueness of family business culture.

Assignment Questions

- (1) Analyze the basic assumptions - the current model of organizational culture which has led to sustainability and accomplishment.
- (2) What other HR practices need to be undertaken to improve the current position of Martin's Corner?
- (3) Is there need for more experienced or more qualified persons to be trained to work under the absence of any of the Pereira brothers or to enhance organizational performance?
- (4) The class is divided into groups and each group is asked to make a marketing plan for the organization from its present position in the current scenario.

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