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## A CASE STUDY ON THE PANCH BHAI RESTAURANT: THE BUILDING, SUSTAINING, AND GROWING OF A START-UP

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**SYLHET**

### ABSTRACT

*The case study finds out that Panch Bhai restaurant has reached the peak of popularity within an incredibly short period of time. Mr. Rafiq, the proprietor of 'Panch Bhai Restaurant,' started this business with a view to providing quality food at affordable cost to the common people of the city. Serving cheaper foods at affordable rate in a homely manner gives the restaurant a unique competitive advantage. This restaurant has taken a few more ordinary-looking yet innovative initiatives that have led them towards success. It has introduced a good variety of delicious food items to its customers, and people from all walks of life, especially the office goers, have cordially accepted those foods. The interior of the restaurant as well as the employees' behavior symbolize a unique example of a successful venture. The more astounding fact is that the restaurant has come all this way without any kind of direct advertisement. For this restaurant, services that it provides are the advertisements and the customers themselves are the mediums of advertisement. The 3H principle—honesty, humanity and hard-work—is the core formula of becoming successful. Success story of this restaurant has been motivating a bunch of entrepreneurs towards this industry. This case contains in detail the journey of the restaurant since the inception of its operation through the initial years to the present state of expansion.*

### KEYWORDS

Panch bhai restaurant, case study of restaurant.

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### INTRODUCTION

This case deals with the early challenges that entrepreneurs, especially of the start-ups, face; it also represents the ways through which those challenges or hurdles could be over-come. This case can also be an aid or a guide to those who would prefer the "restaurant industry" to invest in to starting the venture. It depicts a narrative of the food habit and menu selection process of the working middle class in a country that is just graduating to the Lower-Middle Income category from that of the Poor income category.

### THE BEGINNING & Md. RAFIQU ISLAM

'Panch Bhai Restaurant' is a famous as well as popular restaurant in Sylhet city. Initially located at Jallarpar in Zindabazar, this restaurant started its operation on 10 January in 2010. Within a short period of time, it became very popular among the food lovers. At present, it is one of the most efficient restaurants in the region. This restaurant has become one of the most attractive destinations not only to the food loving people of Sylhet city but also to the tourists who come to visit this city. Reasonable price and fresh, quality food are the unique features of this restaurant.

The captain of this popular restaurant is Md. Rafiqul Islam. He established this restaurant on his own with his indomitable willingness and previous experiences. By pursuing a few simple yet effective business strategies, he has transformed the nascent restaurant into a successful business within a period of seven years which acts as a unique instance to the new entrepreneurs. His success story is now acting as an exemplary motivator for the numerous young entrepreneurs in the region.

But Mr. Islam's journey was not as smooth as it appears to be. He came from a very impoverish family of Sylhet. He is the eldest of the five sons and three daughters of his parents. The financial insolvency of his family has made him curious about earning money since his early childhood. In 1985, at the age of 13, he started to work as a glass boy in a restaurant in Biswanath bazar. In the year 1990 he came to Sylhet city and started to work in Panchakhana restaurant as a table boy. Three years later in 1993 he had been promoted as a waiter and had served in the same position in that restaurant till 2007.

However, in 2005 he founded a small betel leaf store in where he also sold tasty bananas. He was always very conscious about the quality of any kind of food. That is why his piper betel and bananas were also popular at that time. According to him, "people from far away used to come my shop only to buy those fresh and tasty bananas."

Having observed the way a restaurant is operated from a close proximity as a glass-boy, since the year 2000 Mr. Islam had been planning to open restaurant business. Back that time, the prices of food of any restaurant was too high to afford for common people. Moreover, during his job at Panchakhana restaurant he noticed with kin interest that the middle- and low-income people who come to the city for doing job at different offices and shopping centers eat lunch under an arrangement where lunch for ten to fifteen persons are cooked together by a third party (usually by a female). Mr. Islam noticed that if these job-holders can be offered fresh food cooked in a homely manner, then this could be a promising business avenue. At such a backdrop he had been busy in deciding how fresh, quality food could be offered at an affordable price to the common people. This thought motivated him to open such a restaurant later.

In the initial stage Mr. Islam invested all his savings to rent a two-room house to cook food for fifteen people to whom cooked food was sent in boxes. In four to five months' time his clients grew to around thirty. Then in the seventh month he opened-up a small restaurant with a capacity of serving twelve people at a time in two tables. He had operated the restaurant only by himself including the cooking. Although the restaurant was very small in size, but its simplicity, freshness, and comparatively low price have spread almost all over the city from mouth to mouth.

In order to keep pace with the increasing number of regular customers, Mr. Islam had increased the capacity of the restaurant from 12 seats to 24 seats in the second month. In 2007, in order to get the trade license from city authority, he named the restaurant as 'Panch Bhai Restaurant'<sup>1</sup>. By the year 2010, the capacity of the restaurant grew to thirteen tables. Beside this, he had also started another restaurant in 2008, named 'Maa Restaurant'. On 10 January 2010 he shifted 'Panch Bhai Restaurant' to current location, Jallarpar Road, Dariyapara in Sylhet.

Some of the popular restaurants of that time were: *Alpine* at Chouhatta, *Pritiraj* at Zindabazar, *Ishtikutum* at Amberkhana, *Modern Restaurant* at Bandar Bazar, *Panchakhana* at Bandar Bazar, and *Raajdhani* at Lalbazar. Apparently, these restaurants were the main competitors of Panch Bhai Restaurant. By dint of Mr. Islam's *mantra* of freshness and low cost, Panch Bhai Restaurant had defeated all its rivals. Among all the policies that Mr. Islam implied, the most mentionable included least price, taste & quality, hygienic environment, introducing new menus, and heartiest hospitality

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Md. Rafiqul Islam had four brothers (*bhai* in Bangla); the number of sons of his parents was five (*panch* in Bangla), hence came the name "Panch Bhai Restaurant."

The first and foremost objective of this newly started restaurant business was to provide foods to the common people at cheaper rate. Because, back that time in 2000, people had to count at least BDT100 to have a meal at any restaurant. Whereas, at present, people can have their meals at identical price.

The proprietor of 'Panch Bhai Restaurant', Mr. Rafiq, started planning his business concept since 2000. He developed the concept to reduce the expensive price of foods and in 2006 he officially implemented his plan. People of every spheres started leaning as customers of 'Panch Bhai Restaurant' for its comparatively cheaper price and better services than other restaurants.

We can have a look on the differences of price between Panch Bhai and other restaurants:

TABLE 1

Menu	Price in other Restaurants (in BDT)	Price in Panch Bhai (in BDT)
Chitol (Clown Knife Fish)	800.00	300.00
Pabda (Butter Fish)	300.00	150.00
Vuna Khichuri (Lentil Rice)	80/-	20/-

Undoubtedly, Panch Bhai Restaurant took a bold decision of providing standard food at the cheapest rate of that time in Sylhet city. But, the question is "How can profit be gained at such cheap rate?"

Mr. Rafiq himself has answered this question. He says, "The profit of my business hides in buying, not in selling."

To achieve the best output, he emphasizes on two issues:

- Quality of inputs.
- Prices of inputs.

According to his commentary, "retention of customers depends on the quality and the quality of foods depends on the quality of raw materials". He refers 'Honesty, Humanity & Hard work' as his key to success. He believes that these three ideologies can guide anyone in the long race to gain success.

At first, he used to purchase the raw materials of food by his own. He used to purchase vegetables in daily basis to get fresh foods for the customers. But the dry items (rice, tea, flour etc) are stored to avoid some extra problems of maintenance and also for reducing cost of production.

While purchasing raw materials, he is very conscious about the pricing and focuses on minimization of cost. At the primitive stage, he had given plenty of labor to purchase at comparatively lower prices. For example, he traveled all around the country's big markets of cattle. That time, the supply of meats came from different parts of northern part of Bangladesh. He himself went to different places to ensure the quality of raw materials. At present, he has fixed some local distributors who supply raw materials to him.

Behind the selling of food at low and affordable price the effect of ability to buy all of his raw materials at a cheaper rate is undeniable.

Panch Bhai Restaurant never compromises with the standard quality of food. Every day they provide and serve 100% fresh food. There are no records of serving rotten foods to the customers. Panch Bhai restaurant has grown the faith in customer's mind by their reliable service. The remaining foods of the day are not kept for the next day. In this case, Panch Bhai has taken an innovative step. They sell the remaining foods to the poultry firm. Those rotten foods are used for the food of fishes or chickens.

This, in turn, has become an extra source of income for them. So ultimately there is no waste of cooked foods in this restaurant. But the authority always keeps an eye on the excess amount of food not to be cooked. They always keep some half boiled foods along with regular cooked foods. Half boiled foods are kept to handle the situation if there is any unwanted shortage in the kitchen and also to reduce the waste of foods. They use modern technologies to store the half boiled foods as well as to store raw materials.

From the consumer point of view, the quality and taste of the food of Panch Bhai is fantastic. In the beginning, to ensure the quality and the taste of food Mr. Rafiq himself took responsibilities of supervision of cooking. He appointed 2 main chefs who were associated by 6 assistant chefs. There were also 12 female staffs for cutting and blending spices.

Along with the quality of food, the proprietors keep an eye on the external and internal environment of the restaurant. From the starting with the marketing to cooking, every step of cooking and serving is done in a healthy way. The environment of kitchen is always tried to keep clean and healthy. Every night before closing the restaurant, the dining room and furniture are washed by detergents. Everything along with chairs and tables are kept clean.

Besides cleanliness and decoration, Mr. Rafiq also gives importance to serve the food and the behavior of the waiters. Before recruiting any staff, he personally provides training to them. The core topic of his training is, "How to behave with his customers".

In past decades, when a customer ordered something, it could not be exchanged. But Mr. Rafiq did something different. He took some astonishing decisions such as, customer's satisfaction should be the prime concern of the organization and price range should be in the capacity of customers.

According to his speech, "Worse behavior with customer is not tolerable. They are always right and there is no need to argue with the customers". He believes that "No matter what if a customer causes a loss of BDT 20, it's okay to me. Because this BDT 20 will bring me BDT 200 someday for sure".

Staff behavior of 'Panch Bhai Restaurant' is too impressive. For their well behavior customer will be impressed and come back again and again. Although they started their business with only Rice item, but gradually this restaurant added new items in their menu card which were not found any other restaurant in Sylhet city. From the beginning, they started items like 'Chaler Roti<sup>2</sup>' and 'Kala Vuna<sup>3</sup>' which were the newly introduced food items in Sylhet city. Day by day they added some more new items in their menu card. Items like 'Quails meat<sup>4</sup>', 'Pigeons meat' and many other items of Vorta had been brought to the Sylhet city by Panch Bhai restaurant.

After the Fazr prayer, 'Panch Bhai restaurant' starts their business. They came with a new business strategy for the early morning. They started one of their very popular menus called 'Nehari<sup>5</sup>' and 'Vuna khichuri<sup>6</sup>' at this period. Panch Bhai restaurant was the first restaurant to introduce those two food items in Sylhet which attracted so many customers and gave them a competitive advantage against the rivals. As well they have introduced so many new items among the foodies and have retained their successful run.

During the first year, they used to start their business hour in the morning 8 o' clock to mid night 12 o' clock. In that time, the customer capacity was 100. Overall there were two managers to monitor the whole work. They had invested BDT 4,30,000 to establish this restaurant and within three months they started to earn profit.

## FIRST YEAR OF PANCH BHAI RESTAURANT AT A GLANCE

TABLE 2

Established	:	10 January, 2010
Location	:	Jollarpar Road, Dariyapara, Sylhet
Capacity	:	17 table; 100 people
Business Hour	:	8:00 AM to 12:00 AM
Investment	:	BDT 4,30,000
Source	:	Self
Initial Menu	:	Rice, Meat, Fish, Vorta-Vaji, Chaler Ruti. Gradually 'Nehari', 'Vuna Khichuri'.

<sup>2</sup> A native thin bread made of rice powder.

<sup>3</sup> Special dish of beef

<sup>4</sup> Special dish of Quail

<sup>5</sup> Special breakfast item made from the legs of cows or goats

<sup>6</sup> Lentil rice

**PRIORITY FACTOR**

- Customer satisfaction
- Food price and quality
- Restaurant Environment
- Service
- Introducing new food item

**WAS PROFIT AN IMPORTANT MOTIF OR DRIVER FOR THE START-UP?****INITIAL EXPENSES****TABLE 3**

Employer	Number	Salary (BDT)
Main chef	2	6,000 & 5,500
Assistant Chef	6	2400,2100 & 1800
Cutter	6	150x30=4500
Blender	6	50x30=4500
Accountant	Self	-----
Manager	2	6000
Waiter	40	2400
<b>Total Salary</b>		<b>1,40,000</b>

**TABLE 4**

Total Salary	BDT1,40,000
Rent	BDT40,000
Current Bill	BDT15,000
Total cost in a month(without the cost of grocery bazar)	BDT2,00,000
Cost Per day	BDT6,700
Regular sale	BDT1,00,000(min)-BDT1,50,000(max)
Average Cost of operations	BDT6,500- BDT7,000
Average cost of bazaar (grocery)	BDT85,000(min)-BDT1,25,000(max)
<b>Net Profit (Approx)</b>	<b>BDT10,000(min)-BDT15,000(max)</b>

NB: No tax was imposed on Panch Bhai in the initial year

**THE GROWTH**

After a successful year of initializing new restaurant business Panch Bhai wanted to spread out their dimension. They started thinking of enhancing their service as they included new food items. The capacity of customer was increased during this period. The capacity jumped from 100 to 200 rapidly. As well the number of staffs too was increased. They hired new cooks along with new associates. They also hired new women for the purpose of assistance. Women work here as 'cutter' and 'blender'. As long as capacity is increased so is the responsibility. The restaurant had to hire new managers and staffs to render services.

Panch Bhai started to provide service from the very early of the day. They started to open their restaurant after the sun just had flourished. The existing 200 waiters and glass boys (who were to assist the waiter) were classified into two shifts. One shift works from the beginning of the day till the afternoon and the other group works from the afternoon to the late night. They last group has to do the task of washing and cleaning the floor and tables. Then the restaurant is closed at 2 AM; it renders no service from 2 AM to 4 AM. These two hours is the only break time of their continuously provided service.

We can describe the growth stage of Panch Bhai by some specific characteristics. They are-

- Growth in capacity
- Growth in working period
- Growth in food items
- Growth in revenue
- Growth in expenditure

**Growth in capacity:** According to the demand they had created among the customers, it was obvious that they must prepare their capacity of providing more services at a time. So they stopped to make '*chaler ruti*' as it took a large area to be produced. This newly added area is being used as cabin now. Panch Bhai restaurant has now the capacity of serving 226 customers at a time. Just to remember, this number was previously only 100. The restaurant is planning to increase this capacity.

**Growth in working period:** It was 8 am to 12 pm the restaurant used to provide services. But with the increasing demand of their customers they have to increase their working period as well. They now starting their business from 4 AM (5 am in winter) and remain opened till 2AM. They present different types of food in different period. At the very early morning, they serve one of their most popular menus '*Nehari*' and '*Vuna Khichuri*'. They target the students and night-shifted worker as their customer at this period. They start their signature item 'Rice' from 10 AM and it is available at the rest of the day.

**Growth in food item:** Rice has been the first and foremost food item of this restaurant as the main reason behind the establishment of this restaurant was to serve all the people from different levels of the society. But with the flow of time they have started to increase their service item. They have introduced *Tea, Kebab and Chicken & Beef Chap* as afternoon special menu. They have brought so many fish items and extra ordinary type of 'vorta's that every customer wants to have a taste. They have included cold drinks item during this period. Special rice item like *Biryani*<sup>7</sup> and *Polao*<sup>8</sup> have been introduced. Verities of fish items have joined the party. Here customers find some rare types of fishes along with common one. They have come with these so many menus of foods first in Sylhet city. It has helped this restaurant to gain this popularity in a small period of time.

**Growth in revenue:** With the expansion of food items and capacity, the revenue has been increased proportionately. Back to the first year, it was BDT1,00,000 to maximum BDT1,50,000 sale per day and the net profit was tied in the range of BDT10,000-BDT15,000 per day. But now the amount of per day selling has become minimum BDT3,50,000 to maximum BDT5,00,000 and the net profit per day has got a new range between BDT30,000 to BDT50,000. Sometimes this amount becomes higher when they get big orders from any occasional party. Besides they have made an extra source of income through selling their remaining foods to the fishing firm after a day passes by. It has terminated the wastage of food and paved the way to get extra income.

**Growth in expenses:** It is very natural that the expenditure goes higher with the increasing rate of revenue. Panch Bhai restaurant's expenditure has been increased in so many ways. For example, since they increased their capacity to feed more customers at a time, they had increased the staff's number. The statistics have been changed like the chart below:

<sup>7</sup> Traditional rice item introduced by Mughals

<sup>8</sup> Made by scented rice

TABLE 5

Changes in post	Changes in Number
Cook	+2
Assistant Cook	+8
Cutter or Blender	+13
Manager	+8
Waiter and Glass boy	+160
Security guard	+2
<b>Total employees increased</b>	<b>193</b>

The two cooks from the initial stage got the honor of chief chef of Panch Bhai. First chef cooks the item of fishes, beef and mutton and vegetable. On the other hand, the second chef cooks the items of different vorta, roast and Quail bird.

With the increasing number of staffs the gross expense has been increased without any doubt. But another fact has an impact on this salary expenditure. Inflation has caused a vital change in the salary distribution table of the staffs. A large difference can be seen between the two different period of time. It can be showed like below:

TABLE 6

Staff	Previous Salary(BDT)	Current Salary(BDT)
First Cook	6,000	30,000
Second Cook	5,500	24,000
Third Cook	5,500	22,000
Fourth Cook	5,500	20,000
Assistant Cook – I	2,400	10,000
Assistant Cook – II	2,100	9,000
Assistant Cook – III	1,800	8,000
Assistant Cook – (IV-VI)	1,500	7,000
Assistant Cook – (VII-X)	1,500	6,000
Manager cum Supervisor(I-II)	6,000	10,000
Manager (III-X)	6,000	9,000-6,000
Cashier	Nil	30,000

Expenditure has been increased in every spheres of the business. The rent of the space has jumped to BDT1,00,000 from BDT40,000. Electricity bill has increased about BDT 30,000 (in winter) to BDT 60,000 (in summer). Expenditure has been increased in term of gas and water supply. No tax was imposed on Panch Bhai Restaurant during the first year. But according to the government rules, a specific rate of tax has been imposed on Panch Bhai restaurant. It has an impact on the increasing rate of expenses.

Apart from other restaurant businesses, Panch Bhai is not devoted to maximize their profit. They give priority to satisfy their customers. So, they earn comparatively less amount of profit than other existing restaurants in Sylhet. Mr. Rafiq himself says, "Other restaurants try to manage at least 20% profit on their sales, whereas Panch Bhai gets only 2% profit on its sales."

So, the profit of this organization is comparatively less but the service it provides to the customers can beat any other restaurants in this city undoubtedly. That makes the difference between Panch Bhai and all other restaurants.

#### Panch Bhai Restaurant at a glance

(year 2 onward) :

TABLE 7

Capacity	226
Business Hour	4am to 2am
Menu added	Tea, Kebab, Tandoori <sup>9</sup> , Lacchi <sup>10</sup> , Juice, Faluda <sup>11</sup> , Chicken Biryani, Kacchi Biryani, <sup>12</sup> Polao, Fish Varieties, Meat Items, Nehari, Vuna Khichuri.

#### Salaries of Employees

TABLE 8

Employee	No of Employees	Salary (BDT/Per Head)
Chief Chef- 1	1	30,000
Chief Chef- 2	1	24,000
Chef- 3	1	22,000
Chef-4	1	20,000
Assistant Cook	10	10,000-6,000
Cutter	19	6,600*
Cashier	1	30,000
Manager-cum-supervisor	2	10,000
Manager	8	9,000-6,000
Grocery Buyer	1	10,000
Assistant Grocery Buyer	1	6,000
<b>Total Salary</b>		<b>4,20,000</b>

\*Cutters are paid on daily basis at the rate of BDT220 for 12 working hours.

#### Expenditures

TABLE 9

Salary	BDT4,20,000
Rent	BDT1,00,000
Current bill	BDT50,000-BDT80,000
Misc. Expenses	BDT1,00,000
Total Expense in a month (excluding Bazar)	BDT7,00,000
Total Expense per day (excluding Bazar)	BDT24,000

<sup>9</sup> Roasted and marinated chicken

<sup>10</sup> Traditional yogurt-based drink

<sup>11</sup> Cold dessert made from rose syrup, vermicelli, sweet basil

<sup>12</sup> Raw marinated meat is layered with raw rice

Sales (per day):

Maximum : BDT5,00,000

Minimum : BDT3,50,000

Net Profit after tax (per day)

TABLE 10

Sales	BDT 3,50,00	BDT 4,00,000	BDT 5,00,000
Net Profit	Nil	BDT 15000	BDT 40,000

[There is not any formal accounting system in Panch Bhai Restaurant. They calculate their daily profit by summarizing their total cash inflow and total cash out flow. Showed statistics are based on the speech of Mr. Rafiq and our logical estimation.]

## THE FUTURE

Without any advertisement, Panch Bhai restaurant has got the peak point of popularity incredibly. For this organization, services they provide are the advertisements and the customers are the media. Honesty, humanity and hard-work, this triple 'H' function is the main formula of becoming that much successful. The success of this restaurant has been motivating this generation's entrepreneurs for a long time. Mr. Rafiq started this business with a view to providing low cost service to the general people. Keeping this target in mind they have been increasing their facilities day by day. Serving cheaper rated foods with a gentle manner gives the competitive advantages to this restaurant.

Mr. Rafiq has some well-defined goals about the future of this restaurant. He wants to see the Panch Bhai restaurant as a multi-colored restaurant in future. There will be available separate cabins for women, air conditioned hall room, juice corner etc. Some progressive works are under construction. They are building an upper floor which will be facilitated with some qualities to give the space for royal customers.

Mr. Rafiq claims that he has so many unique recipes of delicious food. He will bring those menus after the expansion of capacity of this restaurant. He believes that these astonishing menu cards will attract more foodies to his restaurant.

*There will never be a branch of the Panch Bhai restaurant.* Two specific reasons are responsible for this. First of all he doesn't like partnership business. He believes in sole proprietorship business. So, there is no chance to create a branch in partnership way. The second reason is a bit hesitation in the ownership of next generation of this business. He hasn't any boy child yet. If he never gets any boy one of his younger brother will get the succession. Mr. Rafiq is concerned about the appropriate supervision of his work. It will be difficult for him to supervise current restaurant with a branch single handedly. So, he is not interested to increase any burden on him willingly. Rather he will work for the betterment of the existing one.

## CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

### Questions

1. Why was the start-up started? What has triggered the mind of Mr. Islam towards the venture?
2. What sorts of initial challenge(s) did Mr. Islam face? How did he overcome the hurdles during the early years?
3. Do you support the intention of Mr. Islam to broaden the ventures capacity in terms of numbers of customers served?

## CONCLUSION

The case study finds out that the Panch Bhai restaurant has reached the peak of popularity within an incredibly short period of time. Mr. Rafiq, the proprietor of 'Panch Bhai Restaurant,' started this business with a view to providing quality food at affordable cost to the common people of the city. Serving cheaper foods at affordable rate in a homely manner gives the restaurant a unique competitive advantage. This restaurant has taken a few more ordinary-looking yet innovative initiatives that have led them towards success. It has introduced a good variety of delicious food items to its customers, and people from all walks of life, especially the office goers, have cordially accepted those foods. The interior of the restaurant as well as the employees' behavior symbolize a unique example of a successful venture. The more astounding fact is that the restaurant has come all this way without any kind of direct advertisement. For this restaurant, services that it provides are the advertisements and the customers themselves are the mediums of advertisement. The 3H principle—honesty, humanity and hard-work—is the core formula of becoming successful. Success story of this restaurant has been motivating a bunch of entrepreneurs towards this industry. This case contains in detail the journey of the restaurant since the inception of its operation through the initial years to the present state of expansion.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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