

THE CREATIVE FOODPRENEURS OF THE NORTHEAST

As more and more Indians from across the country connect with the food, culture and people of the Northeast, some entrepreneurs in the region are turning their passion for food into the next frontier of bold enterprise

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There are varied factors that have the power to bring together the people of any nation. A shared delight in food is one of them. And in a nation as unique as India, the curiosity to try new delicacies from other parts of the country allows us to bond even stronger. As more and more Indians from across the country connect with the food, culture and people of the Northeast, some creative and innovative entrepreneurs in the region are turning their passion for food into the next frontier of bold enterprise.

Tenzing, an Engineer Turned Foodpreneur in Sikkim

Whether outside the Japanese Temple at Worli in Mumbai, or at Dilli Haat in Delhi, steaming hot momos make their presence felt across the length and breadth of

India – in metropolises and small towns alike. ‘But most of these momo sellers offer not more than three or four kinds. Also, their basics are all wrong,’ says Tenzing, the 29-year-old owner of Shuffle Momos in Gangtok, Sikkim which boasts of serving 25 different varieties of momos, including chocolate momos! Tenzing was inspired to start this business of the ultimate comfort food, because of a pizza brand ad campaign. He thought, ‘The flatbread is so common and yet brands keep reinventing themselves, and yet pizza can never be food for the soul. What if I elevated momos to a new level?’ And thus, was born his brand, Shuffle Momos.

An engineer from NIT Jalandhar, Tenzing is by no means ‘qualified’ to enter the kitchen but he teamed up with his friend from school days and has not looked back since. His was a tryst with foodpreneurship.

Daphimanroi Warjri, founder of Daphi’s in Shillong

But there are those who recognised their passion for food products at an early age. Take the example of the baking prodigy, Daphimanroi Warjri, founder of Shillong’s own home-bakery – Daphi’s. At age 9, she helped her mother in the kitchen, and at age

10, she could bake on her own. By the time the young baker was 12, she already took cake orders from friends and family. In fact, it was only in 2008 that this BA in Psychology from Christ College, Bangalore, decided to get a formal certification in the culinary art from Mumbai.

An internship and a couple of work stints in Bangalore later, Daphi decided to return to Shillong and start out on her own. With its culture of consuming bakery and confectionary products, her place of birth seemed to have given her a welcoming embrace. In these five years of having run her own bakery, Daphi has been able to regularly retail baked products as well as take orders for cakes. But she didn’t stop at that and went on to partner with a pop-up venture in Mumbai. A great believer in passion and commitment, she is still the central force behind her venture while there are other foodpreneurs for whom this is about a shared vision.

Medo Putsure, Founder of Bambusa Express in Nagaland

Medo Putsure, owner of all five outlets of Bambusa Express (Dimapur and Kohima, Nagaland) has gathered an employee strength of close to 80 youths in the last four years. His vibrant staff includes



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a Head Chef who researches and innovates ways to improve food quality and introduce new items on the menu, and managers who handle daily operations at each outlet. Gearing to make Bambusa Express a franchise business model, Medo intends to step outside Nagaland in the decade to come, including to cities like Guwahati and Shillong.

An MBA from London, Medo believes in delegating to those who have better understanding of an area of expertise. To standardize the quality of food across all his restaurants as well as make for a more economical supply chain, Medo has a centralized food processing unit where the first stage of pre-cooking and basic packaging takes place. Today, Bambusa Express offers affordable and fun food items across Chinese, Sikkimese, Tibetan and fusion cuisines to locals and tourists alike.

But the stories of each of these entrepreneurs do not end at customer delight alone. They are in the process of building successful brands and enterprises as well. As Shuffle Momos’ Tenzing Bhutia


puts it, ‘I’m not a boss, I’d like to be known as the leader among my team members. If my people are happy, then customers will reap the benefits’.

Along the same lines Medo *What is interesting to note is that all three of them at some point knew they needed to acquire skills not just in creating amazing recipes and food products but also in enterprise building*

has begun to think about the next stage for Bambusa Express in terms of scale. In order to lend his brand its own identity, Medo is also setting up facilities for his employees. Whether in terms of pension, insurance, leave (both maternity as well as paternity) and effective ways to incentivize his employees so they would breathe life into the brand.

What is interesting to note is that all three of them at some point knew they needed to acquire skills not just in creating amazing recipes and food products but also

in enterprise building. Tenzing, Medo and Daphi enrolled for IEF’s Masterclasses at various points. Tenzing claims he has grown as an entrepreneur: it dawned upon him during a marketing class that if he could delight people of his own State through their own food, he could make India happy through momos! For Medo, aside from the element of scalability, the IEF Masterclass instilled in him the belief that ‘if you guide your youth, the enthusiasm and excitement to learn and grow your business becomes a shared vision’. As Daphi points out, ‘many food entrepreneurs here don’t have the enterprise building skills’.

Stories of Tenzing, Medo and Daphi tell us one thing for sure, given access to knowledge, skills and specific mentorship; the youth in Northeast India are ready to turn their passions into wholesome enterprises of mouth-watering brands that also create sustainable employment and profits. 

The writer is Chairperson, IEF Entrepreneurship Foundation