

## **Review of My Journey with Vadapav by Venkatesh Iyer: From Street Food to Scalable Enterprise**

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### **1. Introduction**

Venkatesh Iyer presents more than just an individual success story; he provides a detailed account of an entrepreneur's transformation of vadapav, the quintessential Indian street snack, into a nationwide QSR brand. A hybrid memoir, cultural analysis, and entrepreneurial case study, the book stands at the crossroads of bottom-up innovation and top-down expansion. It also highlights the power of native goods to be reframed, rebranded, and upscaled without losing authenticity. This review aims to assess the book's impact on entrepreneurship, cultural identity, and business model innovation in emerging markets, in particular.

### **2. Summary of the Book's Content**

Iyer's story begins with his infatuation and emotional connection to vadapav, also known as "Mumbai's burger." He casts vadapav as more than just a snack, but as cultural currency and a social equalizer, both affordable enough for the masses and beloved by all. Drawing creative inspiration from daily life and mass culture, particularly Bollywood and the film Ram Aur Shyam, he envisions elevating this "Walmart of eating" from street hawker fare into a brand-name restaurant enterprise, akin to multinational fast-food chains.

In 2003, Iyer established Goli Vadapav Pvt. Ltd., embarking on a mission to formalize an informal food economy. Hard work was soon replaced with difficulties, ranging from theft and sub-standard manufacture to pricing fluctuations and family strife. The business went into a tailspin, forcing Iyer to revamp operations by focusing on its core strengths, centralizing production, cold chain logistics, and standardizing processes. This change enabled Goli to grow at scale while not compromising the core appeal of the product.

The book also describes Goli's plans for regional expansion, including in South and North India. Iyer reveals why media outreach, local branding, and trust were crucial ingredients in overcoming regional skepticism. His narrative offers valuable insights into fundraising, investor deals, and franchise management, all grounded in his firm belief in perseverance, innovation, and cultural fit.

### **3. Critical Evaluation**

#### **a. Cultural and Social Relevance**

The book does a good job of helping us understand how cultural products, in this case food, can be re-articulated as entrepreneurial opportunities. How Vadapav has both emotional and market value, and how Iyer portrays this image of Vadapav as a commodity, provides an inside look at the relationship between culture and business. His story supports the notion that local consumption patterns and cuisines can serve as the basis for scalable business models, particularly in diverse and fragmented markets like India.

#### **b. Entrepreneurial Vision and Innovation**

Vision vs Execution is a recurring theme here. The entrepreneurial spark in Iyer is generated from his own experience with the product and his creative will to elevate it to a new level. His translation of inspiration into action, whether through market testing, brand creation, or process streamlining, resonates with ideas of frugal innovation and effectual entrepreneurship. His focus on standardization versus commodification is beneficial for scholars investigating indigenous brand building.

#### **c. Operating efficiencies and process innovation**

A notable strength of the book is its intricate portrayal of how back-end innovation enabled front-end uniformity. Through investments in centralized manufacturing and cold chain logistics, Iyer avoided quality and wastage considerations, typical pitfalls in food retail. And by insisting on a "secret formula," he adds a dimension of brand mystery, but also commentary on the creation of intellectual property in smallholder enterprises.

#### **d. Strategic Marketing Entry and Regional Branding**

Goli's move into new geographies is depicted as a combination of strategic savvy and cultural sensitivity. That Iyer doesn't believe in trying to homogenize down to a one-size-fits-all brand, and instead favors localized marketing methods, demonstrates that he has a finger on the pulse of consumer behavior in various regions. This section provides valuable insights into branding and consumer segmentation in our society.

#### **e. Leadership and Team Dynamics**

As depicted in the book, Iyer sketches himself as a leader who dares to confront internal dilemmas and as a person open to learning and changing. His approach to building a team with a clear vision has resulted in the success of his initiative.

#### **f. Challenges in Stakeholder Engagement**

All challenges confronted in raising capital have been discussed in detail in the book. Iyer's stories of investor doubt and the struggle to maintain fiscal discipline highlight the limited access to venture capital for bootstrapped or culturally specific businesses. The way he has managed to navigate these obstacles has everything to do with the power of storytelling, trust, and credibility in the investor relations debate. This will be a good eye-opener for the budding managers.

#### **4. Strengths of the Book**

- **Storytelling Skill:** The writer possesses a captivating way of telling stories, rich in depth and knowledge of culture and emotions.
- **Managerial Implications:** Offers excellent insight into franchising supply chains and customer engagement in the Indian QSR sector.
- **Teaching Objectives:** To provide a good example for the application of business strategy, indigenous innovation, and localization of the market.
- **Realness:** The tone is never too glossy or self-congratulatory or overtly negative, as other entrepreneurial memoirs can sometimes read.

#### **5. Limitations**

Although the book is richly detailed and reflective, it could benefit from a more concrete theoretical foundation. Ideas such as "implementation," "lean startup," or "resource-based view" are implied but not explicitly stated. Additionally, the book is more experientially driven than comparatively, and we wish it had been more of the latter in service to a genuine academic purpose.

#### **6. Scholarly and Pedagogical Relevance**

Academically and pedagogically, what's your Vada Pav journey too has much to offer. It is an interesting case that provides a lens through which to study entrepreneurship in developing countries, more specifically in terms of its association with cultural inlaid norms and bottom-up

invention. The book is an ideal supplemental reading in undergraduate and postgraduate courses of entrepreneurship, marketing, operations management, and business strategy. Moreover, the story advocates for critical reflection on the challenges of integrating informal-sector products into formal economic systems, thereby enriching cross-disciplinary teaching and research in business studies, development economics, and cultural anthropology.

### **Conclusion**

Vaibhav Kala's *My Journey with Vadapav* is a layered text that successfully mixes the philosophy of Indian roadside cuisine with business rigour. There are powerful lessons in persistence, innovation, and culture-based entrepreneurship to be learnt from Venkatesh Iyer's story. It is must-read material for entrepreneurs, scholars, policymakers, and anyone who wants to understand why homegrown companies can become national powerhouses by centering strategic foresight and social sensitivity.

### **Bibliographic Citation**

Iyer, V. (Year). *My Journey with Vadapav*. Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House. [ISBN].