

## Indian chilled meal regina eyes world market

An Indian home maker who now runs a multi-million pound ready-food empire in the UK is looking to enter the international market with her chilled Indian meals.

Derby-based S and amp;A Foods, with a turnover of nearly pound60 million, wants to expand to other countries, according to its owner, Perween Warsi. Featured in Sunday Times as a leading Asian-born entrepreneur, Warsi's meals are considered the most popular of all Asian ready meals in the UK and are sold through the supermarket chain, ASDA, a Walmart company.

She came here with her doctor husband in the mid-1970s, hardly thinking about business, intent on setting up her home. Until she tasted some Indian stuff being sold in a supermarket. The food did not taste good and the quality was not high, either. She decided to take matters into her own hands, and started supplying samosas to local delis in Derby.

Perween did not stop there. She formed a company, S and amp;A Foods, named after sons Sadiq and Abid, and succeeded in persuading ASDA to stock her ready foods. The business expanded in no time, but she could not get loans to fund a factory. The only option was to tie up with another food company. In 1998 she accepted an offer by the Hughes Food Group to buy a share in her company.

'We try to keep innovating and raising the bar with new product lines, including supermarket takeaway bags and pick-and-mix,' she said.

With its growth and investment problems solved, sales exceeded pound5m, but three years later S and amp;A's parent company went into administration. 'It was not our fault as we had a strong, profitable, growing business, but it made life difficult,' said Warsi.

With the support of venture-capital backer 3i, Warsi bought back the company in 2004. Soon the business was growing fast again, diversifying its product range to become Asda's largest supplier of chilled foods.

'I have no formal qualifications. I learnt my trade by doing it and by learning from the accountants how to do the wages and payslips, Warsi says. Now entirely family-owned, the company makes 1.25 million ready meals a week, employs 600 staff and turns over more than pound60m a year.

*Venkata Vemuri* ( © IANS / India eNews)